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NOTE

THE Sermons now printed were prepared for different occasions, and do not pretend to deal with any continuous theme. To gratify my own feelings I have included two preached in connection with the death of dear friends.

SOJOURNING WITH GOD

Sojourning with God

And Other Sermons

67567

BY

ROBERT RAINY, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF NEW COLLEGE, EDINBURGH

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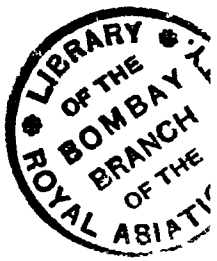

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I

SOJOURNING WITH GOD

"The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."—LEV. xxv. 23.

THE position of things with which these words connect themselves is set before us in vv. 8-17. The children of Israel are supposed to have come into the land which was promised to their fathers, and taken inheritance according to their families. But there was to be a jubilee at intervals of fifty years; and if, meanwhile, land had been parted with, or alienated, it was to return in the year of jubilee to its original possessor, or to his representatives. When land was sold, the purchaser was to have possession only until the year of jubilee, and the price was to be reckoned according to the number of intervening years. Now the principle which underlay this arrangement —the principle which was to be felt, expressing

itself through these provisions and restrictions, is set before us in the text, "The land shall not be sold for ever; for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

That the Israelites might feel themselves strangers and sojourners in their march through the wilderness—so strangely prolonged and so unsatisfying,—could surprise no one. But all the more on account of that experience they might look forward longingly to the promised Canaan, as to a land where, instead of that wandering and weary life, they should be finally and fully settled in their own permanent possession and inheritance. It stood before them as the divinely promised rest and portion. And hence the wilderness and the promised land have yielded so many suggestions and images of the life of a believer, as he passes through his earthly existence, and as he emerges in the end into inheritance and abiding rest. Christian thought about the two stages, of our pilgrimage and our inheritance, has always been very much moulded and coloured by this Old Testament precedent. But in many ways that dispensation was so arranged as to indicate the imperfection of its most attractive elements. So here. They were not to think even of that fair land with its hills

and valleys, its fountains and brooks of water, its milk and honey, as an absolute final possession. Joshua could not give them the rest which the Church of God is trained to seek. When they came into the land, occupying it as their national seat, they did well to be thankful for the inheritance given to them. And yet the lesson of sojourning taught to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, when the Canaanite and the Perizzite held the country, was to be impressed anew on their children after they had settled themselves. Death taught it to each generation: but it was taught also in other ways. They were still strangers and sojourners. Only a blessed light is seen shining through their sojourning state in the last word—strangers and sojourners WITH ME.

This idea, and the impressions connected with it, are carried out for one embodiment in this scheme of a Jubilee, because it implied that no man should assert such an absolute possession of his portion as to have a right finally to alienate it, to give it away or sell it. His control of it had limits: though he was entrusted with control for a time, yet a superior power appointed the time and brought it to an end. If a man should take in hand to dispose of his lot in the land, as

if it were his to deal with at his own discretion, then he was to hear a great voice saying, "This is not yours, but mine; only a passing use of it is yours: ye are strangers and sojourners with me." It was God's land; and they were tenants under Him.

So you see there are two views to be taken of that famous land, about which so much of Old Testament history gathers. When you are looking at the children of Israel passing out of Egypt and through the wilderness, their prospect of this promised Land awaiting them reminds you of the heavenly inheritance held out to believers as the rest that remaineth for the people of God. But when you think of the Israelites in actual occupation of Canaan, then there are aspects of it which rather suggest the provision of earthly support during this mortal life, which God has promised to His children here in this world. As this provision comes to us from our Father's hand it is good; but it is not the best. Moreover, we must not take up with it as our proper portion and inheritance. That is coming; and meanwhile we have an earnest of it in our hearts. But as to the earthly provision, while God's children ask for it—and thank God for it, their calling is to reckon it something that is passing away, and something

that, in an important sense, is not really their own. "It is mine—ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

It may be profitable for us, therefore, to consider this text as it suggests how the children of God in every age have stood related to the earthly possession and surroundings, which God bestows on them in this world. What God sees fit to give them, as long as He continues it, is theirs by covenant. For the temporal blessings are in the covenant as well as the eternal. "Thy bread shall be given thee and thy waters shall be sure." "Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." What is thus given, in earthly things, answers, therefore, to the land given by covenant to the children of Israel, if you consider that land as a portion which the Israelite possessed for a little time, during his mortal life. Now our whole state in reference to *our* earthly portion is suggested to us by these words, "The land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

The first thing suggested is the sojourning condition of the children of God in this world. They are strangers and sojourners.

It must be admitted, in the first place, that they

have here much in common with everybody else. All men are strangers and sojourners; all are as a shadow and there is none abiding. All are lately come into existence—are passing through changes here—ere long shall cease to be connected with the present order of things. What truth is more common, more hackneyed in the mouths of men than this? Well, it is just such truths that are most apt to be neglected.

I know not if there are many sadder things in this life of ours than to watch the efforts which men make to construct or to discover in this world a portion and a rest, striving to surround themselves with what they love and prize, so that the heart may let itself out as in a secure and happy home. It is not the less sad that those who are doing it rarely perceive how sad and vain it is. How earnestly they pursue the task, and with how large a measure of supposed and apparent success!—working on, although it is certain one day to prove vain, nay although they find the house crumbling already as they build it. And if you say, Why call or count it sad that men should try, and not without some success, to create a scene around them that at least shuts out for the time some of the uncertainties of a sojourning state?—I reply, sad for many reasons—for this chiefly—

that these are beings who need a true, an immortal home, and ought to seek and find it now. And when the great Eye of Eternity shall look in through the windows—or rather through the rent roof and falling walls of that fading tabernacle, shall it not be sad to see a man pass houseless and homeless into Eternity? That is what makes it sad.

Now as to the children of God, some one might say that they are not so much strangers and sojourners as other men. Are they not in their Father's care? Are they not living on their Father's bounty? Are not all things working for their good? Yes; and yet they of all men are, emphatically, strangers and sojourners. Whatever might be the case with others, that character emphatically applies to them.

What is a stranger? A stranger is one who belongs to a different country from that in which he lives; and he carries with him something that belongs to that other region; his speech, his manners, many a little trait, distinguish him from the people among whom he has come. So also much that characterises the people about him is strange to him. Their ways of thinking and feeling, of speaking and acting, are more or less unfamiliar to him. When this, through long

custom, has quite passed away, then he is no longer a stranger; he has become naturalised.

Now, certainly, God's children in this world have not, any more than other people, come from some remote region of being in which they could form habits strange to earth; but something has come to them—something that elsewhere had its rising and cometh from afar. An influence has reached them that gives a new turn to their way of life, and has placed them in relation to a new home. So that not only are they strangers "in this wicked world," as the saying goes, but even in the best of earth, in the portion and amid the surroundings chosen for them here by their Father, in the covenant provision which His care has made for their threescore years and ten, they are strangers. There are elements here not congenial to their true life; there are desires and hopes in them which cannot find rest here. They are strangers.

And therefore sojourners. For what is a sojourner? A sojourner is one who does not mean to stay always in the place where he is. He is there only provisionally, and for a time. Therefore his affairs are so ordered that he *may* move when the time comes. He must not take root, as one may do who never means to move.

Those, therefore, are sojourners, who really have in view another "country," another system of things, as their durable inheritance.

The family of believers are strangers and sojourners, not because they are as men who expect to leave their own country and to move by and by to some strange land, but as those who, being in a strange land, expect by and by to go home. From this present country of their being —for them a good country, if faith have eyes to see it so, ordered for them by their Father, and stored with what they need—they are to go to a much better country, whose valleys and fountains and gardens eye hath not seen nor ear heard ; and they pass out from seeing dimly in this land of their pilgrimage to see the King in His beauty in the land that is very far off.

Secondly: observe a great element in this sojourning state emphasised in the text. To be strangers and sojourners has something depressing in it; but a great element of gladness comes when we hear the voice that says, "The land is mine ; ye are strangers and sojourners with me." For a believer this world becomes God's world ; his experiences in it become divine providences, never separated from divine wisdom and love ; and in his sojournings he is assured of a divine

companionship and communion. "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

This is one of the great commonplaces of Scripture. It does not probably require to be illustrated, but very much it requires to be believed. The reality and the worth of it are too faintly apprehended; hence we often see so dimly "the salvation of God." Yet, faint as our impression may be, this is an assurance which no Christian would surrender for any price. "God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide, even unto death."

This is the comfort which brings to believers, even in this life, a hundredfold of recompense for all sacrifices which fidelity to Christ requires. There are such sacrifices; and a certain habitual reserve, a self-control as to earthly satisfaction and treasures, is indispensable in Christian life. This is one of the hindrances to following Christ, experienced by men who hear the Gospel. They begin to be aware that sincere adherence to Christ implies leaving something; it implies, in fact, accepting the attitude of a pilgrim and a stranger in reference to the scene in which they live; and they have no mind to it. It seems to be so dull,

so irksome, so monotonous a prospect that they should regard the world and the idols in it which they have loved, with so cold an eye and so cold a heart as this supposes—and that they should live constantly under the impression (which they would fain be rid of altogether) of the transitory relation they hold to the wonted haunts, and the pleasant employments, and the familiar faces which represent for them the whole happiness of their existence. But really, when we turn to God, when we take up the spirit of this pilgrimage, what is it that happens? No good thing is taken away, but something great is added. A new affection awakens in the heart towards Him who best deserves it, and a great love descends to bless us, proclaiming, "This land of your sojourning is mine; ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

This deepens and widens life and makes it great. In every small matter—trifle, as men say—that belongs to our calling, to be sojourning with God: in every sharp trial that makes the world seem dark, and the cup taste bitter, sojourning with God: in every great effort of duty, where wisdom and strength seem demanded that are beyond us, still sojourning with God: in every great hope and fear that looms large upon the

soul and threatens to swallow us up with anxiety or dismay, still sojourning with God: when death draws on, and every earthly tie is breaking, still sojourning with God. Even as it was with Stephen when they stoned him: "He saw the heavens opened and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

God in our hearts and lives is that which makes all things new.

Now all this prepares the way for the third branch of the subject. What way of dealing with our earthly possessions is expected of us in this situation?

The prohibition ("the land shall not be sold for ever, for the land is mine") implied that the Israelite was not to claim absolute ownership, nor was he to act as if he claimed it. If the land were his in absolute ownership he could give it away absolutely to whom he would. But that was not to be so. He had a use of it, under restrictions, but the land continued to be the Lord's; the Lord had the abiding possession; the Israelite only a transient use as a stranger and a sojourner with God.

Just so now, with the things of sense and time. The portion of these which comes to you, if you are a child of God, is ordered down to the smallest

element by a Father's care. It is given to you for your sustenance—also for your discipline. It is provided for you by covenant as we have seen. It is given to you generously, by one who giveth liberally, and it is to be taken in the same spirit. It is no pleasure to your Father that you should hold it and use it in a narrow, timid, slave-like spirit. Take it and use it with thankfulness and gladness. Nevertheless, you must lay this to heart, that it is not yours. You have a use of it, but it is not yours. It is not your portion, it is not your inheritance, therefore also it is to pass from you. In all your use of it and disposing of it, lay that to heart: "The land is mine; ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

For, my brethren, there is something else that is yours, your own: so your own, that the more you claim it, the more you refuse to part with it, the more you incorporate it with your personal being as an everlasting possession, the more is God glorified, and the more you yourselves are made true and good. Much of what this includes the future must disclose. But here and now faith embraces it; and an earnest of it, a foretaste, a glad beginning of it is sealed upon our souls. That great salvation with its eternal inheritance is yours, your own. But for the rest—"the land

is mine; ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

I would not be misunderstood. Believers are here and now children of God; and because they are His children their Father will provide for them. He will provide not only the better country, but also the things of this life, giving you daily bread and everything of this kind which is good for you, and filling all with His fatherly goodwill. So He "giveth us all things richly to enjoy." And yet these things are not yours—though you have a use of them: not yours as Christ is yours, as God is yours, as heaven is yours. As to your own inheritance, the more your heart awakes to it, the more you set your heart upon it, the more you strive to appropriate it, so much the better. But as to these things of time, take them cheerfully, use them thankfully, yet hold them with a loose hand. "Ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

If a guest comes to any of our houses he has honourable use, for his comfort, of what is in the house; nothing is grudged to him; we are glad to think that he enjoys it all. Yet the things in the house do not become his. Also he puts a certain restraint upon himself; he never forgets, nor wishes to forget, that there are liberties he will

not take, in the way of disposing of the contents of the house, because he is a sojourner only, and no more. So, as to this earthly house and its furniture, we are as it were God's guests, and we are not to act as if the furniture were ours.

If some great person in the earth were moved to be exceedingly gracious to some poor child, he might adopt him for a son, and might destine him to dwell eventually with himself at his own residence, where he should have a son's interest and share in all that was his; yet for wise reasons he might for a time appoint him to dwell in some other abode of his, where he should be on the footing rather of a guest than of a child, and might indeed be under tutors and governors for his training until the time appointed of the father. So of this earth and the things of it; this is not your house, neither are these your portion. You are strangers and sojourners with me.

Therefore, dear brethren, first of all set your hearts the more earnestly on your own proper portion. "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." "Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." "Lay hold of eternal life." "Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

And as to the portion that comes to you of earth, let this be fixed in your heart—that these are not your own. Oh no; God would not put us off with these. Not your land nor your money, not even your friends, except as you love them and hold them in Christ. As to all this, you are sojourners.

And you are sojourners so that you are also stewards. These are your Lord's goods. Administer them for Him. Now a good Lord does not grudge his steward an honourable maintenance in his house; but he expects stewardship—honest and faithful stewardship. For your own training, for your family, for the poor, for the direct interest of the cause of God, be stewards—be stewards that shall not fear the reckoning. It may be little, very little, that is committed to you,—all the more be yours a cheerful fidelity. For he that is faithful in the least is faithful also in much. "If ye have been unfaithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to you the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is *another man's*, who will give you *that which is your own?*"

II

THE RIVER OF GOD

"There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."—Ps. xlvi. 4.

THE river and the city hold such a place in Scripture that they cannot pass as mere casual illustrations. They have a standing significance which deserves to be explained.

We read how in paradise the streams of a river watered the garden. It was a garden, a place of rest and beauty and delight; and it was fit for such a place to be watered well. Luxuriance and verdure are associated with water, with the banks of rivers. So in that garden refreshing influences put forth their power, and become the symbols of higher influences, flowing in full streams for the creature whom God had made in His own image.

Then we find man fallen, and expelled from

those happy seats. But new purposes of God begin to be disclosed. God was pleased to call to Himself a Church from among the children of men—a Church which He defended, upheld, revived, and delivered through successive dispensations. In one generation after another this history ran its course. The Church, furnished with ordinances and promises, and living by faith (Heb. xi.), proved to be separate from the world, and the separation, attended with hostility, proved to be deep. The Church, when true to itself, did not love the world, in its character as the world: and the world did not love the Church but rather hated it, as Cain did Abel. Also, visible power was commonly on the world's side. So then, exposed to potent enmities, the Church lived on, often in distress, but never utterly overthrown.

For its defence and maintenance against the world's enmity the Church had to rely on the promises and on the faithfulness of God. But these proved to be a sufficient, an impregnable bulwark. Age after age, amid open enemies and false friends, the Church survived. All dangers were surmounted. Sooner or later, to all who meddled with her, she was found to be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

Now, because all this was so it came to pass,

more and more, that the Church should be represented and regarded as a well-defended city, within which safety could be found, whatever craft and power might come against it from without. That aspect of things was recognised and emphasised, both in the revelations of God and in the exercises of His people's faith. This was especially the case from the time when, in accordance with the typical character of that dispensation, the place of God's dwelling came to be fixed in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem. Then the children of God were taught to think that the true city of their defence was yet stronger than Zion, with all its high towers and palaces and bulwarks. "We have a strong city. Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks."

The Church, as a company liable to be assailed on every side, took on in this way the aspect of a city fortified against its enemies, besieged, but yet defended. Still, you would err if you thought there was nothing under this image but the idea of confined safety and gloomy strength, such as we associate with walls and frowning battlements. Our text forbids such an impression. There was a river, whose streams made glad the city. With the idea of a place of defence against tumultuous foes, there mingled wonderfully the thought of

shady trees and green pastures and quiet waters. The eye of the Psalmist catches the gleam of the waters, and he exclaims "A river! the streams shall make glad the city." This is the more noteworthy because it is not founded upon any feature of the actual Jerusalem. Historic cities have usually arisen on the banks of considerable rivers: but Jerusalem is an exception to that rule. Little streams were all that it possessed. But the eye of faith saw a river flowing through the city of God. You remember how Ezekiel depicts a wonderful river going eastward from the temple gate, broadening and deepening as it ran (Ezekiel xlvii.). Faith discerned the true city and the blessed river. In this city, ever troubled and assaulted, the garden of God was found again, the garden from which man was banished for his sin. The airs and verdure and fruits of Paradise, its stillness and its peace, were felt and tasted in the Church, although she was compelled to keep watch in a hostile world, and though war might be howling round her gates.

But what shall we specially associate with this river? Especially what forms of higher, of durable good?

We may be helped to find our way here if we take along with us another favourite figure from

the Scriptures, a figure used to set forth the position and character of the children of God. They are, in various places, compared to *trees*, trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord—trees fair to see, and from which fruit was expected and was found. No doubt there were also false brethren, worthless trees, whose fruit withered; but always in the Church there were the trees of God that bore fruit to His praise. Now mark what is said of them.

In Jeremiah xvii. 5, 6 it is said, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, that maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord: for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited." No river there, nor any fruit either. But now v. 7, "Blessed is the man who trusteth in Jehovah and whose hope Jehovah is: for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and shall not cease from yielding fruit." Who is it who here appears as the tree by the river? It is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. The name of the Lord, which is as a strong tower—the righteous runneth

into it and is safe—is also a fruitful soil, which sustains the growth of many a goodly tree. Into this soil the man here described, as it were, strikes down his roots—athirst for life. He depends on God, his expectation is from God: "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." Does he then find God proving to be a wilderness to him—a dry land? Not so; far otherwise: that man shall find himself to be as a tree planted by the waters, spreading out her roots by the river.

Well, then, the man that is in this good case, according to the prophet, is he who trusteth in the Lord. This shows us that whatever the river may be, the flowing of it in any man's experience is connected with the descending blessing of the Lord. It is the Lord's blessing and His grace that make this river flow for men. It is not derived to us from any created source or influence, it is not in any created good that a man shall find it. That man shall receive the good of it, in his experience, who exercises faith directly on Jehovah. It depends immediately on the Lord to send these life-giving and fertilising influences.

Shall we look at another text? We all know the first Psalm, "Blessed is the man" (who has no fellowship with certain evil works, but) "his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he

meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers, which bringeth forth his fruit in his season: his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." Here again is the river; but the description of the man to whom this blessedness belongs, is now, in one view, more specific. In Jeremiah we learned that it is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope the Lord is; but now, further, he delights and meditates in the law of the Lord. He receives the mind of God as it reveals itself in His word. There he finds the truths and the promises on which his faith takes hold; according to these his trust in the Lord is ordered. So he "rejoices at God's word as one that finds great spoil"; his soul "breaketh for the longing it has to God's statutes at all times." We see, then, that practical experience of the flowing of the river depends not only in general upon trust in Jehovah, but also upon communion with the mind and will of God as these are revealed. It is not as if, by some inexplicable charm, rivers of happiness flowed into the hearts of men, quite apart from the revelation of God and the use of that revelation by men. The river flows; but it is the man who fixes and who rests on the word of God, who shall find it flowing for him.

These are only specimens of the way in which the "river" meets us in various places of the Scripture. They are enough to suggest what in general it is that we have here in hand. Is there such a thing as spiritual life? Is there a joy, a vigour, a fulness of it? Can we speak of increase of it, progress in it, desire for it? Then whatever it is that is the secret and support of this life, whatever sustains and increases it, and makes it prosper, *that* is the river.

When we have got so far we find a great subject of thought opening before us. It is nothing less than the office and work of the Holy Spirit of God, "the Lord and giver of Life," the Spirit of Christ, promised and given, who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. The New Testament is full of this subject, but something was made known of it also in the Old. They were not ignorant under the Old Testament, that if at any time "water was sent to the thirsty and floods on the dry ground," that was because the Lord was sending His blessing, His spirit, on the offspring of Zion (Is. xliv. 3). But more fully we have learned, in connection with the New Testament outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that in effect His presence is as wells and fountains and rivers of waters springing up to Everlasting Life.

The Spirit of God is given. He dwells in believers, and the Church is His habitation. He makes the truths and promises of God credible, sure, and welcome to God's children. He not only leads us to Christ; but in uniting us to Christ He condescends to dwell in us that the union may be vital. In connection with the revealed Saviour in whom we trust, it is the office of the Holy Spirit to communicate strengthening and refreshing experience of the benefits of salvation. He enables us to taste and see the goodness of our inheritance; He not only sustains spiritual life, but gives to men to know the freshness, the gladness, the vigour of it, so that we possess an earnest of the eternal portion. He can do this; He does it; no one else can. He does so in some measure in the case of all God's children; for though there may be strange mixtures of experience, and some who long for God may be held in doubt whether they do partake of the vitalising influences of this living water, yet they who wait on God shall not find themselves forsaken. In bringing men to Christ, in persuading and enabling them to cast in their lot with Him, the grace of God brings men not only to the defended city, but to the flowing river which makes it glad. And those who trust in

Him shall, sooner or later, be able to add their own testimony to that of God's Church at large, and say, "There is a river, and the streams of it shall make glad the city of God."

Let us mark how well the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of believers agrees with this figure of the river.

Take, first, such a group of ideas as those of life, growth, strength, fruitfulness. The passages already referred to connect all these with the office of the river.

In Nature, especially in those southern and eastern lands, the connection was conspicuous. When men left the well-watered regions and entered on the desert, life gradually disappeared; grass, trees, birds, animals grew more scanty and then failed altogether; the track might be marked by skeletons of beasts and men that had fallen in the way. The traveller himself grew weary and faint, and felt his strength decay. Then when he drew near again to the fountain or the stream on which he relied, there he found herbage and trees growing, and birds were among the branches, and he saw the footsteps of animals that came to drink; and as he drank and laved his hands in the blessed waters his vigour revived; he was strengthened for new enterprise.

And is not the Holy Spirit the Lifegiver "the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus"? Is it not through Him that we "grow up in all things into him who is the head"? Are we not "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"? Are not the fruits which believers yield in this world "first fruits of the Spirit"? On the gift and presence of the Spirit all these things depend; and "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." But "God has given us of his Spirit." As the believer is led on in any of these experiences, he is in fact realising for himself the flowing of this river. When the practical reality of Christian religion comes home to him; when he becomes conscious of a power with the word, with the promises, with the ordinances which quickens and transforms; when he is made to feel that this salvation includes not merely security against dangers that might assail him, but a new fountain of impulse and progress, may he not say with good right, There is indeed a strong city, but there is more; there is also a river in it, and the streams of it make the city glad.

Or take another cluster of ideas closely connected with the former—those of refreshing, of comfort, of gladness,—associated with a river in the case of all who are cast down through walking

in a wilderness. Is not the Holy Spirit the Comforter? A world of comfort is stored up for us in the Gospel of Christ, in the Saviour whom that reveals. But leave the human heart alone as it were by itself with that Gospel, in the hour of temptation or of darkness, and what entrance to the comfort of it shall be effected? At best it might be as the song of one that has a pleasant voice, transiently soothing, not durably satisfying. The true secret of all the comfort offered to us in the Scriptures, is the Love of God that is in it. But in its reality, and in its sweetness, that love is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." Without Him it does not reach and hold us. And then other sources of comfort and of rest, offered to us by the world, will prove more congenial and attractive. Now we do need real and effectual comfort. If we are to proceed in the race and fight of faith we do need an assurance and an experience of that which cheers, which gladdens. And when Christians are made to feel that there is a joy in the Lord, a glad meeting with God in forgiveness and repentance, in adoption and hope, in faithful obedience and lowly submission,—when this rises into force from its first weak beginnings,—when believers recognise, perhaps amid many outward earthly blessings,

the worth of a treasure far above these, which is their true inheritance, or when, perhaps, amid trials and temptations, they are made to experience a rest, the sense of which steals in they know not how, and a joy which, measured as it may be, must yet be described as nothing less than a joy unspeakable and full of glory—here again may they not well say, "There *is* a river"? Do they not feel that their place of defence is not as the world thinks it, a dark and gloomy strength, but is the very garden of God where all the influences that beautify and refresh have their home?

Yes, my brethren. God is not a wilderness to His people, neither is His Gospel a dry land of barren words and abstract principles. God is love. With Him is the fountain of life, in His light we shall see light. The Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will He withhold from them that seek Him. Now it is the office of the good Spirit of God to make this real to us and to bring home to us the worth and the wonder of it. Through Him we taste and see that God is good. This is the foretaste of our inheritance. And in this His office He is copious and free as a river. Without this we are neither called nor are we allowed to be contented. And therefore one has well said that it is the proper character of

Christians daily to pray for the Holy Ghost, that they may be partakers of Him in all the benefits which He comes to bestow.

This subject suggests some matter for practical consideration.

1. It is to be feared that some of us—or even many—have no faith practically in this doctrine of the river. When I say so I do not mean merely that they fail to experience the influences of which I have spoken, or that they come far short of the benefit they might have. I mean that our subject does not enter into the scheme of their lives, nor is it contemplated as having any real significance. Some notion they may have of the need of a city, of precaution or defence against conceivable dangers. For this reason they may possibly pay a certain respect to religion and to religious observances. But for anything that pertains to the vigour and the gladness of life, its interest or its elasticity, they look to quite other sources than the River. They may treat reverently, without contradiction, what is said of blessedness being found only in God Himself; but they really do not imagine to themselves the existence of any true happiness or any vigorous life, but a worldly happiness and a life devoted to worldly objects. They flee or retire into some religious observances

to quiet their consciences; but any impression that visits them at such times is transient, and is indeed chiefly depressing. If I should concede to them that such occasional religiosities on their part, should be reckoned as equivalent to sheltering in a city, yet they again would have to concede to me that there is no river in their city. And that is why they are perpetually obliged to leave it, and come forth again for water to sources that are outside. I repeat; I am not saying merely that they do not enjoy the benefit of the river; I say they do not know what the river means—they have no practical persuasion that there is within the city anything that can be to them a river; so they never seek it with any earnest faith.

My brethren, what sort of thoughts of God do you cherish? Do you suppose that God who made you does not know how to make you happy, or does not care to confer that boon; or do you suppose that God is Himself a being of gloom and darkness? I tell you God would be ashamed to be the God of a man, and to call him into a city, if He had not provided a river in the city. No! this kind of religion is a mistake throughout. Do you not feel it to be so? Seek something better—ask for something better. Be-

lieve me, there is no true spiritual life that does not include a thirst for living water, for a well-being which only the Spirit of God, opening the things of Christ, can supply; there is no true faith that does not include an earnest belief that this river flows, full of quickening and comfort; there is no true Christian progress that is not progress in understanding that there is a river, and that the streams of it make glad the city of God.

2. Some may be discouraged because they know so little of this blessing, because they seem to fail in any actual enjoyment of it. They seem to themselves to attain little spiritual power, little spiritual rest. Or, perhaps, in time past they seemed to have a measure of it; but now it is not so. And you would not help them much by suggesting that in this last case they themselves may be to blame for wilfulness or unwatchfulness which have undone their peace. They would answer that most likely this is true, and it makes the case all the more sad.

Well, various kinds of spiritual history may be comprehended under this general description, and to discriminate them, or try to deal with them distinctly, would be out of place now. But this shall be said in general:—Fix your eye on the

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on the benefits He brings with Him; think of the blessedness which this is designed to carry into the hearts and lives of men, which should be yours, if you could, as it were, reach it; and then lay hold of this, that "there is a river," and in that faith wait on God from whom it flows. Ask for it. For, indeed, there is a river. "True," shall some one say; "I believe it with all my heart; I know there is a river, but I seem never to reach it, it looks so far away. How shall I come to it? It seems as though I should faint and fall long before I reach its banks." My brother, or my sister, the river will come to you. You do not know how soon, how wonderfully; you do not know what instrumentality, seemingly feeble, what occasion, seemingly fortuitous and slight, may be that on which you shall find yourself even standing by the waters that you may drink and be glad. "When the poor and needy seek water and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them, I will open rivers on the heights." We read of one of old for whom, when he was in extremity, water was made to gush from a strange source, and "the place was called En-hakkore, the well of

him that cried." Even so instantly may you become aware in your heart how good God is, and be able to testify with His Church that indeed there is a river. But be aware also of your own fault and foolishness; and ask as one who deserves nothing, yet is taught to expect all things.

3. If the truth be so as we have stated it, if such a river flows, then why are we not better Christians—richer, stronger, more courageous, more glad, more single-hearted, more enterprising, more fruitful? If this river of God flows for us, why should we be so weak as many of us are? Alas! how we bereave ourselves of good! How we fail to believe in earnest what we do in some sense believe! And how wilful we are under God's discipline! When the good Spirit of God would lead us forward to further experience of His goodness, as sometimes He does, by breaking up some pleasant earthly condition of things, that we may gird up our loins and take staff in hand and go forth, not knowing whither we go—ah! how we rebel! We say in our hearts, This is not like to bring us to any good; and we fall back, and cling bitterly to that pleasant past, making flesh our arm and departing from the Lord. Or when He sets before our eyes more distinctly sins

that must be mortified, efforts that must be made, duties that must be faced, and when we feel something in the heart stir, as commonly it will, to resist that call—ah! how we say to ourselves, "This is not pleasant, this is not like the river of God; this promises toil, and the dust of battle, and the pain of cross-bearing"—whereas, indeed, that to which God calls us is, for all that, the only road to the fuller experience of what the river of God can be, and can do for us. How poorly God is trusted even by His own children!

Yet the river flows—the river of the water of life. John saw it flowing when his visions were losing themselves in the glory that excelled. He saw the river of the water of life clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. So evermore the blessed Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Yet this shall be our closing word: that there is more in the grace of this divine agent than even this image of the river, copious and beautiful as it is, is able to set forth. All that He is; but who is it that awakens in our slow hearts a thirst, a longing, a sense of need that cannot be satisfied from other fountains? And who, amid all our wilfulness and misunderstanding, persuades and enables us to come to

Christ for the living water which He gives? Who but this blessed agent Himself? How gladly then may we preach, and how gladly may we hear that there is a river and that the streams of it do make glad the city of God.

III

REST FOR GOD'S SERVANTS

(Preached, 2nd Nov. 1873, in connection with the Death of Robert S. Candlish, D.D.)

"But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."—DAN. xii. 13.

THESE words are addressed to Daniel, now an old man, when his work is over, and little remains for him but to die. He had lived through a long life, which, though an exalted, had been in many ways a trying one. He had thought much and cared much for his people. He had occupied a high position in the hierarchy of a great heathen empire, serving and glorifying God in that peculiar post. He had received visions the most remarkable, revelations the most impressive, which were not for himself only, but were through him to be transmitted to the Church. All this was over.

He had no more work to do, he had no more visions to see, it remained only to look forward to his last journey. But as he is dismissed—he who had received so many majestic messages for the Church—he receives this word for himself: "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

I. The first observation which I found on this passage is, that for God's servants this present life is a time of labour, and in respect of it their time of rest is not yet. They are looking forward to their rest. This is the place of labour, with its accompanying measure of weariness and pain. Rest is an eventide blessing, and comes when the day ends. True, the Gospel holds out a present rest, real and wonderful, to men believing. There is rest, indeed, in receiving the reconciliation, the redemption through Christ's blood, even the forgiveness of all trespasses. There is a rest, also, that arises in the new order and harmony of the soul brought home to God. The believer in Christ has reached a foundation that cannot be shaken, he has found a spring in which is resource enough for all service, and consolation enough against all sorrow. God is with him; Christ is with him; the Spirit of all grace is with him. Therefore there must be in his state an element of rest.

The faith of this lies at the root of all that a believer is and does.

And so it comes to pass that, as the servants of God go through this world, whatever toil befalls them is in a very emphatic manner mingled with actual ministries of rest, imparted to them by their Lord. These fall in, in time of need, fitly and effectually; the heart is calmed and cheered, the feeling of strength and resource revives, the man draws breath and looks around, his courage rises to set forth again. I say this befalls *them* in an emphatic manner. For, indeed, it is part of God's common bounty towards men; and men must take no common pains in sin, to deprive themselves of a large experience of it. No man runs the race of life all in one heat. There are innumerable breaks in life from which, in some sense, new beginnings offer themselves. Morning succeeds morning, and season follows season. And ever between come soothing influences, that persuade the relentless past to relax its grasp a little, so that rest renews the man. Thus it is in human life generally. But in Christian life it takes place in a quite peculiar manner: for in Christian lives grace and providence join together to care for this interest of rest with a wise and loving completeness. A Christian may be exercised

with hard and perplexing trial. But yet he must have, and he has, such a measure of rest mingled and infused, as a Father sees to be most meet for him. In the case of most, how much of this is given, and how much of it at every turn held out, if the eye were keen to mark it, and the hand prompt to take it! Would that we valued it more suitably, that we used it more wisely.

However, though all this be so, it is yet true that, called to rest in God, the Christian is also called to service; and this service has in it a laboriousness, a burden-bearing, an experience of weariness and an exercise of patience. That rest in God strengthens him to bear his burden, but does not annihilate it nor conjure it away. So, then, this life is the time of labour. The rest, as to this, remains. There may be an adherence to Christ and His word which steadies and supports the man—there may be many a refreshing vicissitude in the progress of his life reanimating and restoring—there may be an exhilarating sense of resource in the Saviour's grace, under the influence of which, at times, all burdens come light, and are lightly disposed of, as by one who triumphs in Christ. For all that, the present is a life of labour, not rested from as yet.

True, we stand fast—if we stand—in a risen

Lord. Believers pertain to Christ risen and exalted, and He belongs to them. In Christ risen they are justified from sin—in Christ risen they are partakers of the Spirit—in Christ risen they share in a victorious life, which cannot fail in the Head, and shall not fail in the members. Their faith, marking the course of Christ through life and death and resurrection and ascension, cleaves to Him as passed through all, and they learn to reckon themselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God. As risen with Christ, they seek the things which are above, where Christ is. From Christ risen their life derives, and from the point of view of Christ risen, their progressive life is to be constructed and built up.

But yet, though they are in fellowship with Christ in glory, believers have to follow Christ in His humiliation. "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." The life of faith in a triumphant Lord is exercised in infirmities, in labour, in patience.

This labour and patience of the servants of God may be said to have a body and a soul.

The body of it stands in the succession of things to be done and endured,—the things in which a man learns practically to comply with

the will of God, and to embody continually his choice of the better part. These come in their succession with the hours of life, and in their variety as they respect the persons and the things that stand around us in God's providence. There is a will of God to be chosen and fulfilled in them, as they pass; a will of God to be accepted and endured. To do it, to bear it, has a peculiar sweetness and a great reward, if we have the faith of Christ and the spirit of adoption. Yet to do it and bear it, for those who live as yet by faith, under much infirmity, compassed with temptation, and very sensible of pain, involves toil.

Then this labour, if it be alive, has a soul in it —a soul of faith and love and patience:—faith that depends on Christ and draws from Him; love that renders and yields itself to Him; patience that accepts burdens and toils, looking away to the hope that draws on behind them all. Now these dispositions are obstructed in their exercise by the conditions of our present life. Nay, they are not only obstructed in their exercise, but assailed in their very existence. They can live only in the confession of sin, in the renunciation of self, in the taking up of the cross, and in the resisting of temptation. Hence faith must not only work, but fight. How can this be without

labour, without toil, without the dust and weariness of battle?

There is, then, much in life, and in God's service, that may make rest welcome, and render it a fit promise that the believer, after he has done the will of God, shall inherit rest. Commonly, in the case of thoughtful and progressive Christians, the sense of the preciousness of this blessing, and the craving for it, grow as life goes on. The service becomes more spiritual and loving, and yet the prospect of the rest becomes more attractive and endearing.

Let us ask ourselves whether this aspect of Christian life is to us practically intelligible,—not merely a matter of plausible discussion, but something that comes home. Do the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope, open themselves at all in our experience, with elements of difficulty and perplexity and toil and endurance, in connection with which rest becomes a hope—not the rest of defeat or unconcern, but the rest of deliverance and of victory? Rest is sweet to the *labouring man.* It is he who plies the arduous oar through the winds and currents of the changeful sea, that looks forward to the relief of laying it down when he has attained the other side. The service of Christ is no slavery,

indeed; it is a free and loving service. But there does adhere to it, while we are here, a toil and an endurance.

Now, what has been said on this subject has, I believe, a peculiar verification in the case of some believers—I mean of those whom God calls to eminent place and work in His Church, bestowing upon them remarkable gifts, and gracing them with a very large heart to spend and to be spent in His service, especially in times of trial and conflict.

It falls to the lot of such men, in a peculiar manner, to make the burden of Christ's cause their own. More than others they must take on themselves the responsibilities of the Church: thinking, forecasting, confronting Church duties, Church necessities, Church dangers, services which the Church may render, attainments which the Church may make. All this imposes not the less burden, but more, if, as in Churches which possess what we consider a scriptural constitution, such men have no exceptional power; only the moral power arising from the gifts bestowed on them, the confidence reposed in them, and their own peculiar grasp of principles which all their brethren hold along with them. That no way diminishes the responsibility, and it often largely multiplies the

work. To them it falls in some great crisis, not only to counsel, but to animate; to inspire the needed tone of feeling, to organise and sustain action, to keep means and ends in train;—in a word, to feel within them the pulse of many hearts, to bear the strain of many forces, to hold on to great results through many perplexities. They live a larger life with more expense of mind and heart and power.

Whatever may be the burden which all this involves, one may suppose that a certain elevation and animation of feeling falls to the lot of men who thus see more, and more clearly, than others see, and can sway the minds and the affairs of men as others cannot do. Still more, to have large views of the work of God, to have a heart to design much, to attempt much, to expect much in His service, and in this course to live not without God's prospering blessing, must have in it a peculiar gladness and reward.

But it must have its own peculiar toil and pressure. And the feeling of these will commonly *grow*. For, first, if a man sees farther than others, he sees yet but a part, and a little part, of the great problem, the complex conditions which have to be dealt with. To see the whole is His prerogative who sits on high. In this way the

element of the uncertain comes in, with its difficulties, and its added burdens of anxiety and responsibility. And then though men, the wisest, can see but a little way, yet we can all *see* farther than we can *do*. The work that is done ever falls short of the want that is seen and the work that is planned. However generously and wisely the plans are laid, however steadfastly the work endeavoured, still the inexhaustible world plies its unwearied enginery of unbelief; the human heart reveals its myriad phases of the reluctant, the repugnant, the intractable. The bright conception of what the Church and the Church's labourers might be and do within the years of a mortal life, shoots out before with a blaze of promise when the work begins. What the Church becomes and her labourers do, lags far behind as the years advance. Moreover, as the blessing of God comes in at times with a fulness that none foresaw and none could plan, so elements of perversity and confusion come in as unforeseen. Commonly, also, the call to eminent work, and the opportunity for it, is connected with some impulse operating in society and in the minds of men; some impulse which the worker is peculiarly qualified to understand, and guide, and utilise to the service of Christ. The perception of such a tide in the

affairs of men, and of its strength, and the consciousness of its possible results, must be one of the chief subordinate encouragements and elements of strength when a man of power first launches forth on any high career. But the tides of this great sea, of which we form a part, are inconstant. New currents run, and cross or quell the old; they bring new perplexity and new toil, they impose new conditions on the voyager, they raise new doubts to be mastered and subjugated by faith.

Hence it comes that those whose lives have been full of help and blessing, and have left the most durable and precious fruits, have often rendered the service through a peculiar experience. Others stand round them with loving and admiring hearts, thankful for great service rendered and great benefit conferred; but their training draws into itself much of toil and battle, of burden and disappointment. This experience grows with time, needing ever new grace for endurance and submission. The crooked that cannot be made straight, and the lacking that cannot be numbered, come into manifestation and experience, out of measure and above strength. Through all this also goes the sense of personal unworthiness, deepening with self-knowledge and with trials. And, finally, God, in His faithful grace, willing to

complete the discipline, adds, in His own way, special touches of decay and special pangs of disappointment. Now, there is no unkindness in this discipline. It makes way for a more purged and childlike faith in the unhasting God—a more meek submission, a more sublime and heavenly comfort: but it certainly does chasten the glow of the workman's delight in his toil; it certainly does make very sensible the wear and stress of life in the service here; it sets forth an admonition that this is not the rest, written in a character hardly legible to others, but very plain to those whom it concerns. Often such men have expressed the lesson they had learned. It pervades the utterances of Luther's latter years. The settled form of speech of Knox's old days was his looking once to see an end of his painful battle. And the greatest of those who have served our Scottish Church in our days left it on record, in a singularly pathetic passage, how the lesson of his old age, in connection with plans for the cause of Christ and of men's salvation—in which his heart, his powers, his life had been spent—was to submit himself to God's supreme disposal, and sit down, at the end of the day, content to put the unfinished work, the unfulfilled hopes, into God's hand again.

God's servants in this world have a labour and a patience in respect of which their rest comes not here. And a very peculiar discipline in this respect falls commonly to the lot of eminent servants of God, who are made great blessings to the Church in their day.

II. But this labour has its period. Then the labourer is sent away to his rest.

One has gone before us who never sinned, but who was conversant with sore temptation. He was the eternal Son of God; but He became true man, and, as such, subject to the changes, and partaker of the experience, of time. Throughout His life on earth, His faith reposed on His Father's character and word as on an unshaken rock. Yet His was a history of labour and endurance which pressed sore on Him. He knew what it was to be weary, and grieved, and harassed. He knew what it was to spend strength, which to appearance was spent for nought and in vain. He knew what it was to look forward, with the anxious feeling of expectancy, to trouble coming, which should try the strength and the endurance: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." He knew what it was to find the trouble passing from expectation into experience, so that He was very

heavy, so that He cried for help, so that He endured the utter pang of one whom God had forsaken. Enduring all, His trial ended. Then He passed into a state of glorious rest. In that state He still works, working for God's glory and our good. But now no more with toil; now no more with the troubled expectancy which was His experience before He died. Now with an ineffable possession of all that pertains to the glory He had with His Father before the world was, with the calm of a sublime rest pervading the energy of His loving administration, He moves on to all the results that must crown His work on earth.

But He has suffered, being tempted, and He is touched with the feeling of our infirmity; and rest has been to Himself a very glad and welcome thing, coming after travail. Therefore, while He appoints to His servants their day of work, and amid the blessings of the life of faith disciplines them with their measure of toil and pain, He will certainly (and not too late) bring them into their rest. When they die in the Lord, they rest from their labours. The weariness, the perplexity, the feeling of being overburdened and overmatched (felt even when faith believes the contrary), the feeling of being worn and strained and broken,

in the work of life, shall give place—it does give place—to a blessed and perfect rest. We ought not to grudge it to them when they pass away to it.

In speaking of it there may be a perplexity arising from the unknown, or at least unmeasured, differences that may exist between the state before the resurrection and the state after. But I shall not make anything of that. Whatever employment or change of employment pertains to the blessedness of the redeemed, or marks its progress and completion, no doubt this blessed rest persists through all.

But what can we say of it? How little we know, and how readily we may wrong that state with words ordered amiss by reason of darkness!

1. One thing certainly we may fix upon—its sinlessness.

There are times when this thought attains a peculiar beauty, and comes over the mind with a peculiar comfort, in thinking of the blessed dead. At any time it might well move and draw us. Yes, they sin no more; they shall never sin any more; never once any more. No temptation shall assail them; no danger, such as compasses our footsteps here, shall ever haunt their path again. They are done with that. How easy watchfulness would be for them,—in that clear

light, with those serene and ordered hearts, in that pure and holy air. But it needs not. The battle is ended, the enemy is conquered, the enemy is dead. For their own defence they need bear arms no more. So they rest. What exercise, what high employment, may be theirs, we do not know. But this wonderful rest goes through it. Sin and temptation come nigh them no more.

2. It may be worth while for one moment to think of the *constancy* that must be ascribed to that state, by the help of which we may the better conceive its rest.

Here we live in a continual experience of change. And the elements of change go deep into our lives, so that inconstancy becomes their inevitable character. The clouds darken down and hide the sun. Again, passing influences exhilarate us, and we all but wholly forget some deep evil within, some solemn danger near. Fixed and powerful characters retain indeed a constancy which we recognise and confess; yet it is but relative and partial. Religion gives a constancy of belief and of tendency that has in it the earnest of a better state, yet for the present it is maintained with difficulty, in spite of the fluctuations of the tossing sea on which we float. But then, how different! We cannot tell, indeed, the manner of

the relation to time which they sustain who have passed from earth to be with Christ. We cannot prescribe what grateful vicissitudes of feeling and surrounding and employment, may visit them. But how deep and clear must be the consciousness below of the unchanging elements of their state. Looking backwards and forwards, how must the goodness of the Lord fill the scene; how must the perfect wisdom of the Lord's great plan rest their thoughts and their hearts; how must all change, if change there be, come only in to reveal it to them in some fresh form, that mercy and truth have met together, and have become theirs —most inwardly and for ever theirs! For want of some such constancy, our rest here is unquiet and precarious at best—a brief snatch of breathing; but they possess it there. What a foundation for a quick and mighty life, burning in God's service through the ages, yet evermore in its inward depths at rest!

3. Let us close this with saying, that it is a rest in love—in the love of God and Christ, experienced and responded to.

Is it not a strange thing to think that their state is one in which the manifestation of God in His majesty and His love communicates a perfect rest? Surely this is strange. We know how

any great experience, religious or not, disquiets us here. The heart beats quick, and becomes too full, and joy itself becomes painful. Not so there: not so with those who are made conscious of the love that blesses them, and of the nearness of that uncreated and eternal Nature. What manifestations are theirs of the Father's name and the Father's grace; what deep, true, fit response to these; what fellowship with Jesus Christ, who loved them and gave Himself for them; what attainment in insight, in just and noble feeling, in deep and pure devotion! Yet it shall come communicating a perfect rest. With those that are gone to it, it is rest. The heart is not fevered; the pulse does not thrill unquietly; the eye that looks out on God, with so deep a worship, so true a love, so glad an admiration, looks quietly, calmly, tranquilly, with a pervading consciousness of a perfect peace. How wonderful! This is indeed rest. Shall we compare it to the frank, untroubled gaze of the little child, as we know it on the earth? But these are spirits gathering wisdom and ripeness as the ages roll. Ah, well! into their strength and moral stature there is come the grace of a perfect childhood, with its absolute trust and its free-hearted joy. Then the great mystery of the Sonship of believers opens itself at last, and

the heart utters all the meaning of the language of adoption,—Abba, Father.

III. I ought to observe to you, thirdly, that there is a lot for God's servants at the end of the days. I must leave this mainly to your own thoughts.

We have seen how the servant is exercised on this earth, with the feeling that his wisdom and his strength come short—that vanity cleaves to his works—that decay overtakes him. We may stand round admiring and thankful; but he is forced to render all, many ways imperfect and perplexed, into God's hands—submitting to the discipline which will not admit into life the rest of a complete success.

But in this lot, at the end of the days, he shall find the work in which he bore a part perfected. In the wisdom of God the great result shall emerge fully achieved, bearing no trace of imperfection.

And he shall find his own labour in it. His works follow him. Every effort made in faith and humility has its recognised and honourable place. It was not thrown away; it was not a failure after all. So, when God subjects His servants to that discipline which the most eminent of them, and those that have served most faithfully,

have experienced, He is not sending them away as useless servants. Not so. Only the *manifestation* of the grace with which he gladdens them is delayed till all can rejoice together. They are lost to our view for a while. When they reappear, they come "bringing their sheaves with them." Yes, they come, not with sheaves only, as labourers whose work abides, but with wreaths also, as conquerors that have overcome, partakers in a victory that has become complete and eternal. "Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days."

Such are some of the thoughts that may occur in connection with the departure of him whose loss we mourn, and of whom it is our humble trust that he has departed to be with Christ, which is far better. After the touching words spoken this morning by one so peculiarly authorised to speak,[1] I know not that I have anything to offer further that might not better remain unspoken.

This was observable of him, that whatever his range of powers, he gave himself up wholly to the Church of Christ, to the ministry of the Scottish Church—of the Church as in Scotland we have conceived its message and its work. Of the main

[1] Rev. Robert Buchanan, D.D., Glasgow.

convictions and tendencies thus indicated, he took intense possession; he felt in them, he ascribed to them, a nobility and a beneficence which never became doubtful to him; and this intense possession kindled into flame in the vehement experiences of the years that preceded and followed 1843. This ministry of the Church had won his mind and heart. He never affected to belong to another fellowship, to speak from another standpoint. He had his eyes very open to the movements of thought and feeling in circles far removed from his, was prompt to understand them, curious to scrutinise them, anxious to speak to them, but always from his own point of view, and with the most unreserved utterance of his own convictions.

He took up on its nobler side, and with the expansiveness suited to his own genius, this Scottish conception of the Church, as the institute to which the carrying on of the work of Christ by the Word is mainly committed. How much could be made of the pulpit, no doubt, yet not of the pulpit only, but of the Church also, as an institute which draws into itself the strength of the individual lives to give back that strength enhanced, and works with common forces, for common ends, was with him a practical conviction operative throughout his whole career. In

this widest form of it he was a Scottish minister. To this form of life he brought the genius of a preacher, a thinker, a man rarely gifted to mould and move his fellows by every form of speech, a practical guide of men and affairs. His life fell on a time of trial and crisis, constituting a great opportunity and creating great possibilities. With these predispositions, and in these exceptional circumstances, his lot was to be of the foremost. What his comrades were, we heard in the forenoon. And, without contradiction, I may say of him that he, above all others, represented the *vis viva* of the Church, and was the means of awaking and reinforcing it; he, above any other, stood connected with its impulse, its activity, its energy. The scale on which our convictions and our principles were embodied in actual organised results, the conceptions of what might be aimed at, and dared, and done, derived from him more than from any other man. To the attainment of these results incalculable service was rendered by his extraordinary power of planning, organising, setting in motion and keeping in motion. But while all this multifarious power served, that which it served was a great Christian thought. It was his conception, which he always refused to lower, of the amount and kind of work for the

good cause that might be attempted and performed by the Church of Christ, and especially by a Church placed in our peculiar circumstances. It was his conviction, deep and strong, that, in order to sustain and reinforce an exceptional zeal in the people, the Church should manifestly count upon that zeal, and should go forward, not questioning that the Lord's grace would draw it out.

So much he had to do with the Church's activities. But his place and service were not less eminent in connection with that which underlies all activities—I mean those main convictions, those characteristic principles which determine the peculiar genius and influence of every branch of the Church. His mastery here was amply proved before the Disruption, was constantly relied on after it. To the end our Church, on every great occasion, looked to him for the guiding and uniting, as well as the inspiring and elevating utterance. It was by him she found her better or holier instinct expressed or evoked, and the latent possibilities of her principles and her position expounded. Whether as regards utterance and action on questions that lay within her own domain, or as regards public questions that concerned the whole community, there was

no one to whom she looked to form and to express her mind as to him.

Those who see nothing memorable in the Disruption, nothing worthy in the action and influence of a Church with the principles of ours, will naturally think his life a mistake, a force thrown away. Be it so. He spent himself in this line ungrudgingly; because he felt that along the line of the constitution and principles of the Free Church, the work of the Catholic Church of Christ in ministering the Gospel could be done, and the ends of that Church attained. And we accept the testimony of his great predecessors and comrades as well as his, that they found their work in this line worthy of all their devotion, and the place not too strait for them. That the same sympathy with the main Christian interests regulated his thinking and his work as a theologian; that here also he carried the sympathies of a Catholic Christian thinker into the heart of the convictions which he held as a Scottish Presbyterian, I should not count it difficult to show, were this the time or place. It appeared both in the manner in which he confronted teaching which he thought to be amiss, and in the manner in which he formed and stated his own views of truth.

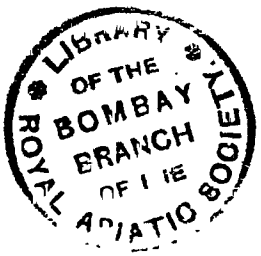
But if any one should still doubt whether, through all his activities, his main effort was, as I have asserted, to promote the Gospel and the cause of Christ among men, or only to advance the credit and interests of a sect, then I should appeal to you—to your experience of his interest in all that worked towards practical ends, to your remembrance of his prayers, and to your knowledge of his preaching. To you it is needless to characterise that preaching. You know how the Gospel of the grace of God was made to penetrate through every kind of contemplation for which the pulpit can find a theme. You know how the Word of Christ was opened up. You know how singularly practice was worked out and presented in combination with Christian grace and truth—how life by Christ and life in Christ were made luminous to your minds, and commended to your hearts. What other qualities that preaching had, needs no words of mine to declare. I have said so much and no more, because I am aware that in the case of very many here the remembrance even of the intellectual splendour of his preaching gives way to the more impressive and more touching remembrance of personal indebtedness to the preacher for spiritual good received by his means. And you knew the man. You knew

his utter freedom from everything sordid. You knew the warmth and sincerity of his friendship. You knew his manliness and his generosity. You knew how incredulous he was of anything base or evil in others, how ready to repose trust, how surprised and pained when narrow and ungenerous natures denied it to himself. But I pause. It is vain, and hardly seemly, thus to multiply words.

His departure is a great event for our Church. He so represented the spirit of the time we have seen, its aspiration and achievement, its courage and its faith, that his passing seems almost to carry along with it that time itself, closing the era; almost to carry away with it the spirit of that time, leaving us to "other manners, other times," in which the Church may as well resign herself to fall back into a lower life. For changes are telling us how rich we have been, and how poor we are becoming. But let us guard, let us heedfully guard, against impressions that do wrong to faith. Let us be assured that the gifts and the grace for each time and for ours are in His keeping who changes not. Prayer will bring them down. Lord, teach us to pray.

His departure is a great event for this congregation. The loss is sore. The blank is very

great. It is well to mourn it. It is well to be stirred and roused by it. But yet, if your late pastor's voice could reach you now, speaking to your present case—if he, breaking the silence, could admonish you as in former days he used to do—what words should you hear of confidence in God and of ceasing from man, what lofty and generous words of faith! His faith let us follow, remembering the end of his conversation.



IV

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

"Ye are the light of the world."—MATT. v. 14.

A WRITER on the "Dark Ages" has remarked that those ages, after all, were not so dark as some imagine; people in the Dark Ages could see their way pretty well. He observes that when you go forth from a well-lighted house into the street, after the evening has closed in, everything seems very dark to you; but the people are going about, pursuing their avocations without embarrassment, having light enough for practical purposes. The light is very scanty to your eyes, coming, as you do, out of a blaze of illumination; but it is of very good use to theirs which are accommodated to it.

Whether this writer made a happy application of his principle to the Dark Ages I will not inquire. But his point of view is intelligible.

Now a like mode of view occurs, I daresay, to many people in connection with what is said of the darkness of our world, and of our race. The Bible does speak frequently of darkness prevailing in the world, of the need of light, and of the coming of the true Light into the world. "The light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." Many will ask, Is the darkness so very deep? Suppose it to be true that Christ brings with Him some additional and peculiar light, yet, even without Him, is there not light, and indeed light enough? Was there no light in Greece before He came? Was there no light in the Roman world independent of His influence, in Seneca, for instance, or Epictetus? Is there not such light in the world now? Certainly a boastful sentiment about light—about light not derived from Christ—is widespread among men. The eighteenth century was full of talk about enlightenment, and the excellent effects of it; and the enlightenment was what we call rationalistic, not Christian. A like impression, at least as strong, is cherished, no doubt, regarding the intelligence of our own age.

And a man must be blind indeed who does not recognise what a mass of valuable truths has been accumulated for us, truths which have come

to pass current as common property among men, truths which well deserve to be called light, because they direct us how to think and act in regard to a thousand interesting and important matters. Great systems of such truths have been set in order for us by thoughtful men. This we ought to value much, receiving it with warm gratitude. Yet, for all that, there is a *darkness* in the world. It is a darkness which no influence but one can dispel. Nay, it is *the* darkness, that which most properly and sadly deserves the name. So also that which removes it is most properly and emphatically *the* light of men.

For a darkness has involved us with respect to the relation in which we stand to God,—to His character and His will. A light is needed which will effectually disclose and carry home to us God's mind about us, which will reveal the use and end of human life in the view of God; which will, if it may be, show us how durable and happy relations with Him arise for us, in which He effectually blesses us, and we securely trust in Him; which will give to our life a reason and a goal. Over this region a darkness has lain in human experience, and the sages could not penetrate or remove it. Also it is a darkness which besets men individually with this special aggrava-

tion, that sin has vitiated the eye of the soul and indisposed it to receive the due effect of light.

Now our Lord, having regard to this darkness as a fact to be dealt with, says to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world." He spoke it to the first company of disciples; but you have only to read, for instance, the epistle of Paul to the Philippians (ch. ii.), or the twelfth chapter of Luke's gospel, in order to see that the saying is not confined to them. He speaks it to all His disciples. You take your place at His feet, very likely, as chiefly conscious of the great need you have of a Saviour, of His healing and illuminating grace; by no means feeling fit or ready to be employed in any great service on behalf of Christ, either as light, or in any other capacity. Nevertheless, if you will not renounce discipleship, you must let your Lord have His own will as to what He will appoint you to, what He will make of you. And what He said to that representative company of early disciples, He does say to every one of you that claims benefit by Him, in the character of a disciple, "Ye are the light of the world."

The first question here is this, How the disciples come to have this character or quality—to

be the light of the world; and how they are fitted to fulfil their function.

This is explained when we remember that Christ, who says, "Ye are the light of the world," says also, "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12). In this matter, as in so many, Christ goes first; and as He comes into view in His unique grace and virtue, we may well be disposed to say, "He goes alone—there is none like Him." Yet in some wonderful manner He associates others to Himself. He produces in them, one must say, a likeness to Himself; and He says, "As the Father sent me, so send I you."

Christ, first of all and supremely, is the Light of the World. Of Him we may well say, "That was the true Light coming into the world." You then, if you are disciples, become the light of the world, because, first of all, you receive the light for yourselves, dealing for yourselves with Him who is the true Light.

In Christ God shines out, credibly, convincingly, effectually; he who hath seen Christ hath seen the Father. In Christ God is seen, not only sending His Son in the flesh, but reconciling sinners to Himself in Him. In Christ the true glory and the true blessedness of human nature, in the nearest relation to God, is disclosed. In

Christ we find God claiming and taking relation to us, that He may bless us and we may love and trust in Him. In Christ light shines on the way back to God, and on the way of walking with God. In Christ the meaning of human life, the use of it, and the result of it, are made luminous. And in Christ all this becomes practical and available for our individual selves. The darkness is past and the true light now shineth.

Here now a strange thing meets us; it can only be mentioned now, though it deserves the gravest consideration. It is this, that men can be conversant with light, and yet not be enlightened. They can discern it to be light, they can contemplate it and discuss it, and have various interesting thoughts about it; and yet they keep it outside somehow—as if it never got in, as if it never came home, as if it never pervaded the man or his life, as if *he* remained in darkness, even while his eye was holding converse with light! I am not going to dwell on this; but I must note it, as I come to the disciples and their dealing with light. For no doubt there are some of you, though I have not the least knowledge which of you it may be, that are, alas! specimens of the case I am describing. You have plenty of light, and are walking in darkness.

But when we become true disciples this light of Christ gets in as something real, welcome, doing its blessed work; it begins to be the light of our own hearts and of our own lives. It begins to illuminate the man and his thoughts and deeds. It becomes a light to see by and to judge by, a light to walk in and to live in. "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Then the manner of our existence begins to take a stamp and character, which is due to the true light, shining in our heart.

So far as this is the case with any of you, your life becomes, in its degree, luminous; it constitutes a specimen of the Father's goodness—it affords some reflection of it. No doubt all human lives, dark or enlightened, have much that is common to them all. They are made, as it were, of materials which are common to all lives; at least, very largely that is so. But, not to speak of the new element in a redeemed life, even the common elements are polarised anew when God in Christ takes His place in connection with them. It is the light of Christ welcomed, entertained, made ours in its gladdening, vivifying, revealing, and directing influence, that gives this new

character to the life, making it luminous and bright.

But now this does not befall us like an accident, without thought or prayer; and it does not continue to take place as a thing that, once settled, needs no further care. It is a great question for us how we are entertaining this light and dealing with it.

For as I have said there are some who are holding it at bay that it may not prevail in them. They are content that the god of this world should blind their eyes, lest the light should shine in. And then, there are some who have, no doubt, some part in the light and some benefit by it, and yet come culpably and far short of the benefit they might have. Still farther, some who began well, may by and by greatly intermit and withdraw from their hearty converse with the true light; and, in that case, although there may be little falling off in the virtuous habits of a decent profession, there will be sadly lacking the clear effect of Christ's influence making the man's existence a luminous thing for the world.

It much concerns us, therefore, to consider how we are dealing with this Light—Christ. A general recognition of Him, and indeed an admiration of Him there may be, and yet failure to take in the light for use, to get the good of it. What pains

are we at to let this light shine in upon all we are and do, so that there might be luminous agreement with Christ, and lightsome walking with Him?

For example,—How far is this light taken in, how far sought and welcomed, to show us our personal defects, our faults and shortcomings? In this light, if earnestly received and honestly dealt with, it ought to appear to us how, and in what, we vary from the true standard. And yet what shall we say of disciples who have great defects of character, and yet never seem to become aware of them, never apparently wake up to apprehend how these things look in the light of Christ? It may be your indolence, it may be your covetousness, it may be your selfishness, it may be your arrogance, it may be your bad temper. Other people see these things very plainly; those who live in the same house with you note them continually; how is it that you don't yourselves discern them as evils demanding the most serious recourse to Christ, if you are a disciple receiving and using the light?

Again, how far is this light carrying into your mind from day to day—continually quickening within you—the energetic conception of true goodness—its nature, its beauty, its worth? That

surely is something made evident by this Light. What thoughts might a disciple have of the beauty of holiness, stirring him with a strange and strong attraction, awaking aspirations and efforts far removed from the poor ambitions of earth! But alas for our hazy, vague, dim thoughts of what goodness is!

And again, how far is this light stirring you with a sense of the encouraging and attractive influence of God's goodwill to us in Christ, so that your heart grows warm with the discovery of the Love that God hath to us? That is what makes this light to be the light of Life. Also, how far is this light making the Christian course to be for you, as the days go by, matter of fresh discovery and new interest?

This should be the occupation of each day's loving thoughts, of each day's expectant prayers, namely, to have our world lighted up for our own eyes by the illumination of this light; to have the objects of faith made clear to us in its radiance, and to have its faithful scrutiny brought home to our own principles, to our own conduct.

One thing in this connection is commended to us by our Lord as most essential; He requires it, and no doubt He gives it to those who ask. That is simplicity, sincerity; not only in the sense in

which that is opposed to conscious artifice, but as it is opposed to impure and indirect motive, allowed or cherished in the heart. "If thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light" (Luke xi. 33 *f.*).

My friends, if you will faithfully and lovingly deal with the light of Christ; if you will prayerfully seek its entrance and its presence; if you will welcome it, walk in it, see by it; if you will let it take dominion at its own sweet will, your whole life shall be filled with the influence, with the benefit of that healthful light; and you may be made the means of transfusing its influence to others in a degree which at present may seem to you to be impossible. For our Lord says, "I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life" (John viii. 12).

So much for the first point, how disciples are qualified for this office. Now secondly, let us consider the office itself. How shall it be discharged?

The world—that, it seems, is the sphere. It would be difficult to define it so as to fix precise boundaries. There is the great world of those who know not God; but there is a great deal of the world in the professing Church. There is too much

of it in believers themselves; so that we need all the help we can get from one another. Wherever and in whatever form the "World" presents itself, there is the field in which this Light might work. Ye are the light of the world.

True, as we have said, Christ is the Light of the world; but now that Christ is gone, the world is prone to think of Him as a beautiful dream. You must be the proof that this is no dream, but the most practical of matters for living men. It is you who must exemplify in the world, the standard, the hopes, the inspirations, which are not of the world, the mind of Christ, the ways of Christ. You must be so influenced from the true Light that, as they look at you, men will say in their hearts, "See, there is light,—there is such a thing—it is working there."

It is true, as we have said, that men may be aware of light, may hold converse with it in a certain way, and yet refuse to yield to its sway, or to admit its influence. They may shut it out. If men do this with light as it comes from Christ, they may certainly do it with light that comes reflected from you. And indeed you must take it that your influence in this matter will always be only secondary and subordinate. When men do begin to confess the need of divine light and to

seek it, they will at the same time begin to catch the radiance, direct, from the Sun of Righteousness Himself. They may continue to experience some benefit from you, but they will be mainly occupied with a clearer and a better light than yours.

But yet you may well magnify your office. For, in the first place, it is your part, as the light of the world, to exert upon the world the influence—not only restraining, but also moulding and elevating —which should arise from the world's recognition of a truth and grace which it does not as yet enjoy. And, in the next place, you are to be made the means of awakening impressions and longings in worldly minds, in which the Spirit of God often makes the beginnings of His own decisive work. That Christ and Salvation, that a blessed relation to God and a life accepted by Him, are practical, are credible, are real, and that the claims on men, connected with them, are serious and pressing—these are thoughts the maintenance of which is of great moment. This is your office and calling, as the light of the world.

This will come to pass through no strength or skill of yours, but by your letting Him shine through you, which is therefore your great business. Now in giving effect to this observe the place which our Lord gives to works, *v.* 16, "that they

may see your good works." It is not what you see, it is not what you feel, it is not what you say (though I know that sometimes a man's words are great works of faith, and take effect as such), it is what you are in practice. It is that something distinctive in the life, which comes when Christ the Light is honestly and lovingly dealt with, and when we walk in the light. Then it comes out, somehow, that a man's works are wrought in God. Then the world, looking at the man, sees a light which awakens the consciousness of its darkness and its need.

Ye are the light of the world. But let us think how far it really is so. For some who profess to be Christians wholly renounce this calling; and some are content to be dim, dubious, debatable Christians; and some care little how they multiply stumbling-blocks and causes of offence, that hinder the world from getting the benefit from their life which otherwise it might get. But how is it with us? The "world" is a big word; what impression do we make in our own family? What light of Christ is seen in our bearing and course, by those about us?

Ye are the light of the world. Are there noble and worthy thoughts of God—is there grateful and confiding adherence to Christ—are there loving,

self-sacrificing impulses toward men, moving up and down the world in your persons, setting the mould and form of your own life?

We must derive from Christ light to shine by, as well as light to see by; the one tests the other. The world is entitled to look to us for light; but what if the world, looking, should find nothing distinctive in our practical life; nothing in our estimate and use of money, nothing in our choice of friends, no preference of the nobler and higher ends of life, little pronounced sympathy with goodness, little compassion for sorrow and sin, little simplicity and elevation of character, little of strength, endeavour and victory: what then?

It is you who are to be the living refutation of the agnostics. The precise affirmation of the agnostics is that no such light is available or can be found. Useful light, they say, there is on many subjects that concern human life, but in this direction none. Christianity again is the precise affirmation, on the other side, of God as known in Christ—of the true Light come into the world. You may be the embodied proofs of it, shining as lights in the world.

Ye are the light of the world. It is a message to each disciple. But it is also collective. It assigns the joint ministry of all together. And

looking at this aspect of it must we not consider how the general standard of Christian life and profession should be estimated, and how far it may require to be raised?

What if the world in some of its specimens comes forward with virtues and with a standard of living which too many Christians cannot emulate? Apart from that, may not the average or common conception of the Christian character require to be greatly raised? Certainly we are to thank God for the grace which has maintained in the world, amid temptations and discouragements, such a witness to Himself as the Church of Christ has furnished in spite of all defects. But remember this—if you are to be true to your calling as the light of the world, you must *aim*, at least—you must aim at something far higher than the common average attainment of good people. That might be your mark if you had no better—if "good people" were the highest light for one another. Your eye must rise far higher, to the Light of Life Himself: only as you admit that supreme influence will you be able to contribute effectually to the office of the Church, as the Light of the world.

V

THE REQUEST OF ZEBEDEE'S CHILDREN

"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him," etc.—MATT. xx. 20-23.

THE request which was addressed to Christ by the mother of these disciples (themselves were also parties to it) strikes one as embodying a sadly coarse conception of things pertaining to the kingdom of God, and a corresponding carnality of motive in the way of dealing with them. And when all this is put to Christ Himself, as a proposal for *His* acceptance, the incongruity is so great that it becomes absolutely quaint. One cannot help smiling. At the same time one feels that we have here a sad specimen of the contrast between the mind of Christ and the average mind of men; a specimen of the strangeness and the

pain that must have continually beset the mind of Christ as He held converse with men on earth, even with His own disciples.

You see the idea is that when Christ comes to His kingdom there must, in this as in other kingdoms, be favourites near the throne—men through whom chiefly the king administers, and on whom chiefly he bestows friendly intimacy and intercourse—men, therefore, whose position is the most glorious and the most enviable in the State. Such posts, like all posts in this world, go largely by favour; and a timely application, well pushed home, may do a great deal to secure them. There are others who may suppose themselves to have claims; no doubt James and John have a good standing among the disciples, and so may be thought to have a fair prospect; yet others might push in, and it is well to take time by the forelock and see what can be done in the way of securing the position. Every man for himself: every mother for her own sons. Honour, enjoyment, resource are to be secured by putting or keeping others out, and ourselves getting in. A stroke of business might be done, perhaps, which would secure the future, putting these two first and all the others after.

It is the same thing we know so well in appli-

cations for appointments and the like in ordinary life. By rights, every one *ought* to wish, the candidates themselves ought to wish that the best and fittest man should get the place. Therefore, by rights, every one should be anxious to promote the discovery of the best man—to throw light upon that question. But practically, it is not easy, in most cases, to make *that* point quite clear. And practically one knows that a great deal can be done by judiciously assailing those who have the appointment with influences of various kinds. And each candidate knows or believes that such influences will be used for the others, and that his own claim will be prejudiced if they are not used for him. So each man and each man's friends resort to push and influence, I don't say unscrupulously—often, I suppose, with a desire to keep within the line of fair play—yet so that push and influence and favour have more to do, certainly in most appointments, than they ought to have according to the reason of the case. Such is the imperfection of men and things at present, that the self-assertion and the push for places seem to be inevitable. But to have all this applied to eminence and position in the kingdom of God strikes one as singularly strange and crude. It does; and yet, perhaps, the difference between

some of us and those disciples may not be so much a difference in the way of looking at things, or a difference in the principles we apply to them, but rather only this, that *we* have trained ourselves to express the matter more piously; we have learned how to clothe selfish or carnal aims in a garment that hides the deformity even from our own eye.

Altogether, it is a very carnal motive that is here seen entering into the affairs of Christ's kingdom. In general, it is a good thing to seek excellence. Even emulation may be generous and loving in regard to some kinds of attainment —for instance, when the virtues of others stir us to run the race with zeal like theirs. But here—along, we admit, with some real regard for the Master, which rendered it pleasant for them to contemplate close association with Him—we have the well-known desire to get foremost and uppermost, and to keep others below us and behind us. That is a poor business anywhere; but in the kingdom of Christ it is a kind of blasphemy; it denies the very nature of the kingdom. Here, if any man will be great let him be least of all and servant of all. Yet in the Church of Christ this disposition has continually appeared, from Diotrephes down to any one who strives to have his

own way, because it is his own, at a congregational meeting. In Christ's spiritual kingdom—not always in the embodiment of it here in the world —this is a motive which defeats itself. But with what confidence does it here make its appearance unashamed in the immediate circle of our Lord's followers!

Yet let us notice that if we choose to think this to be a very carnal way of aiming at success in the kingdom of God, we must own that it implied a very strong faith in the reality of that kingdom. The mother and the sons might so completely conceive the kingdom in the old forms of Judaism and in elements of this world, that they could not but try to work the situation, as they might have done in any earthly kingdom where they had access to the king and a chance of influencing him; that might be so; but still, at all events, they vividly believed that their master was a king, and not only a king but *the* king—God's own King, who should fulfil the promises, and set up the kingdom of blessedness and glory. They believed this of Him who had not where to lay His head, who walked with them up and down Judea and Galilee. That was a remarkable faith, and we must give them credit for it. This effort of the mother and the sons

would not have been made at all, unless that faith had taken possession of them. And we, who criticise perhaps, may do well to ask ourselves whether our thoughts of the kingdom (possibly more spiritual) are connected with the same vivid belief in the reality and certainty of it, and of the assured triumph of Christ the King. Are our thoughts such as set us on to the practical business of securing—SECURING our own interests in that great certain imminent future, as well as on submitting ourselves to its sway, and entering heartily into its spirit as it looks to the redemption and welfare of mankind? Let there be no mistake about it. This mother and her sons were at all events far before some of this audience; for while, by the light that now prevails, you really have more correct thoughts of the kingdom, and could state more accurately the principles on which it works than these disciples could, yet for you this is all idea only; it has not the practical force that should lead you to make decisions—it does not lead you to break with sin and earthly ambition, and to aim supremely at place and possession in the kingdom, whose benefits you correctly apprehend and could correctly describe.

Once more, consider this—while these mens' thoughts of the kingdom were so crude and ran

so much on what was material, after the pattern of earthly kingdoms, yet, after all, Christ was there, and the love of Christ gave a deeper significance to it all. It was Christ who had drawn these men and their mother into the circle of His disciples, had gained their faith, had won their hearts. Christ had opened to them somewhat of the meaning of the ancient Scriptures; and if they misunderstood some of His own promises, yet they knew *Him*. If the kingdom was misconceived by them, yet Christ was to be the King of it; and no doubt, therefore, it was, in their view, to be the kingdom of true goodness, of righteousness, and of peace. In that character, no doubt, its hopes were dear to them; and whatever confusion and inconsistency swayed their request, no doubt the hope of being near Christ—trusted *by Him*, employed *by Him*, appointed to honour *by Him*, had its place in their ambition. Their motives were mixed, but there was a good element in the mixture. The world in which their faith moved might be largely carnal, but Christ was in the heart of it, Christ partly understood and truly prized.

And that may be one reason why our Lord, though He lets His own light shine on their erring ambitions, yet does not absolutely condemn the

men. He does not treat their petition as wholly and hopelessly astray. There was, or there might be, a meaning in it far deeper than they were themselves aware of—which afterwards might reveal to them its significance and read to them its lessons. Yet they must be made to feel how strangely their request strikes their Lord's mind. To have it as their secure and appropriate place to be first in His kingdom! "Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of and be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?"

He knew what participation and position in that kingdom implied—a strange cup to drink, a searching baptism to undergo. He who was to establish the kingdom and to secure its victory knew by what forgetfulness of self, by what endurance and self-consecration the task was achieved. And those who claimed to be nearest to him—most participant in the victory, most influential in the affairs of that kingdom—were really claiming most fully to bear their cross after Christ, to share His mind, to embrace at all costs His aims, to be shaped into the fellowship of His sufferings, into conformity to His death. Little they understood it. "Can ye drink of my cup?" And they said, "Yes, we can." For how, after such a request, could

they flinch from accepting whatever it implied? Besides, a man's courage is roused when it is challenged; what He meant they did not know, but whatever He meant, they did not mean to be lightly turned back. They said, "Yes, we can."

And now, how graciously does our Lord wind up the conversation. Yes indeed (though not in their own strength) they were, and they were to be, followers of Christ. In their degree they were to partake of the cup and be baptized with the baptism: and by their Master's grace they were to prove true and willing. In that experience they were to learn their own weakness; but they were to learn also the grace that is perfected in weakness. Their blunt "We can" was to be changed into "We can do all things through Him that strengtheneth us." In that experience they were to learn the love of Christ, and to be bound to Him by ties enduring unto life eternal. So much was His to give. But to be first in the kingdom and nearest to the throne—No. Who should be led to such a post, by what training, and by what fidelity under the training—that remained veiled. And indeed that was not Christ's to give; certainly not His to give in the manner which they seemed to count on. That final order of the kingdom was to be determined by what

should befit the kingdom and the King. Human ambitions were to have no place in settling it. It lay in an order of things of which no explanation could be given to the curiosity of men. It was already known no doubt. It was ordered in the eternal counsel. "It shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."

Our ultimate place in the heavenly kingdom (if our face is set that way, and our hearts have bowed to the King) is being prepared here. The best blessedness in the world above must be associated with fullest fellowship with Christ, greatest nearness to Him spiritually, most complete entrance into His thoughts, dispositions, purposes. All there are like Him—but there may be in the case of some a depth and width and height of attainment that surpasses, and surely with this goes the capacity for higher blessedness. Well, this is prepared for here; the mansions in the Father's house are taking shape, in correspondence with the characters, the growth, the renewing of the mind, *for* which the discipline of this life is the appropriate scene, the fitting opportunity.

Now it is not for me to say that those are learning no lessons, are making no progress, are growing into no fitness for a place above, whose lives are predominantly cheerful and bright, re-

markably, perhaps, and for long periods free from troubles, not only outwardly but even inwardly too. It is a state of things which one may say seems not the safest,—few of us perhaps could do with it,—many of us would be ensnared by it; and where the case is so, the warning to watch is, I suppose, more imperatively needed. But who can tell how God, who works great wonders, may enable some of His children to use tranquillity well; to pass through it without unduly trusting in it, without clinging to it; with hearts that are thankful for present good but yet are lifted above to the better portion? We will therefore do well to make no rash judgment. If need be God will send to such appropriate discipline by and by; and the way in which they walk with God under it, will perhaps reveal whether the loving-kindness of the Lord has been happily improved.

But with very many of us this would not be best; and indeed for all of us surely in some form, at some stage, things must go differently. For the very Son of God learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and the process of cleaving to God under trial and temptation, patience in enduring when the discipline lasts long, and acceptance of the lessons which sorrow and conflict teach, are elements in the training by

which men and women are conformed to Christ. So we are made lowly, and loving; so our souls are attuned to right thoughts and dispositions Godward, and are enlarged to be richer, stronger, more blessed than they were before. Therefore the question of the rank of that permanent state which is to be ours, if we attain that world, is a question connected with a preparation, the essential constituents of which must find their place in this life, and must include a discipline of trial and pain. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Can ye drink?" "If any man will come after me let him follow me."

And notice that it is not trial merely, and for its own sake. It is trial or conflict or self-suppression accepted on our part at our Father's hand, accepted as it comes from Him, with a certain willingness and sweetness. It is one thing to bear what falls upon us with grim determination because we must. It is another thing to take it gently and even gladly, maintaining faith in the Father's goodness. This is what God enables His children to do, sometimes only after long dark weary struggles; but when that point is reached a great reward ensues. Then the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us; then we are conformed to the likeness of our Lord.

So questions arise for us. The cup will come; what about drinking it? The baptism will present itself; what about receiving it? A spirit of sincerity, of humility, of thoughtfulness, of docility, of trust, of love, of patience, will have its opportunities. Is this history going on? How is it going on? Are our lives rising at all towards our eternal place in the eternal kindgom? "It is given to them for whom it is prepared."

But on the other part there is here to be recognised that wise sovereignty of God which discriminates. Not all alike are capable, not all alike are designed to be highest, nearest, most intensely blessed; and not all are seen by Him to be fitted to pass with advantage through the same experiences. So there may be gain for us in knowing something of the experiences of others and how they were dealt with; but after all, for each of us the important question is about our own. Our own lives are *our* opportunities for learning how to embody in our own history and character the ideas of Christ, the disposition of Christ, the submission, the diligence, the patience—some measure of these. Do you ask to be received in the heavenly home? to have your own place in the kingdom of our Lord? Then, can you drink the cup—can you be baptized with the baptism?

How graciously our Lord means this (but He does mean it in the case of each, one by one, who would enter in), appears by the closing words of the passage. These men, at their stage of thought and character, had made bold to ask the first and highest place before everybody else. The only possible reply might seem to be, "Ye know not what ye ask—Can ye drink," etc. But yet because He *had* called them, and they did love Him and meant to follow Him, He adds a gracious word, "Ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and with the baptism wherewith I am baptized shall ye be baptized." Yes, my dear brethren, if the Lord Christ has begun to take His place in your hearts He will train you—very wisely, very fitly, very watchfully. You shall drink of His cup and be baptized with His baptism. It may not come to pass in ways that seem very startling or very overwhelming, but life will give you from His hand the opportunities. If you wait for Him, very lovingly He will aid your infirmity, will enable you to believe His word, and teach you to drink His blessed cup. Mark the patience of Christ with slow, dark, and indeed presumptuous disciples, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."

You must be made partakers of the mind of

Christ if you are to be associated with Him for ever. Therefore you must share in the discipline in which it becomes a practical thing to deny self and to follow Him. That is the reason for the trials to which sometimes people are subjected, who seem, to those who look on, to need little trial to mend their lives, because these are exemplary already. But this is the fitting preparation for higher attainment, and for greater blessedness. It must be so; in what degree, in what manner fulfilling itself, we cannot foresee. Others may escape it, but not those who are seriously setting their face toward the better country. It must be so. Do not try to escape, do not wish to escape from it, and do not be much cast down about it. "In me ye [shall] have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

VI

SLEEP

"Then cometh he to his disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."—MATT. XXVI. 45.

"SLEEP on now, and take your rest." The words were addressed by our Lord to Peter, James, and John, on a very special occasion. It was the night on which He was betrayed. The things concerning Him were coming to an end. The betrayer was close at hand.

For some days before this time things had been falling out that were ominous, and which might well awaken in thoughtful minds anxiety and unrest. On the way up from Galilee our Lord had warned His disciples with great distinctness of what was to happen (Luke xviii. 31 *f.*). After the arrival at Jerusalem we read of that memorable scene in which our Lord's soul was "troubled".

at the prospect of the coming "hour." He prayed His Father to glorify His name, and an assenting answer came audibly from heaven. Two days before that to which our text belongs, Jesus defended the woman who anointed him, saying, "She did it for my burial." That night He had instituted the Lord's Supper, had spoken of His betrayal as now at hand, had told them He would no more drink with them this fruit of the vine. Also He had warned Peter of the temptation to deny his Master, which was drawing near, evoking Peter's vehement protest that he would die with Him. It was after all this that He went into Gethsemane and took Peter, James, and John apart, and said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death, tarry ye here and watch with me"; and then He went farther and fell on His face under such a dark cloud of anguish and amazement as no man can fathom.

During all this time, when the prospect of the hour and power of darkness lay so heavy on His spirit, nothing is more evident or remarkable than His continued, His unfailing solicitude for the interests of His disciples. Nothing was omitted of warning, of instruction, of promise, that might be fit to guard or to sustain them through the coming trials. His own burden did not in the

least drive them out of His thoughts. This very night He had provided for them the great ordinance of the Supper: and after that He had addressed to them the wonderful communications which fill the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth chapters of John's gospel, and He had offered in their hearing the prayer of the seventeenth chapter. What would it be to hear that prayer offered from our Lord's own lips, and to know that He offered it for us! Never were men who had trials to go through more lovingly provided and cared for.

And now the weight of His sorrow was descending; the cup was in His hands to drink it. No man can measure it; but some of the circumstances and accompaniments we may conceive. He was there in the crisis of the world's redemption, wrung with the agony which forced the bloody sweat from His body. He was waiting for a disciple to come and betray Him, for thirty pieces of silver. He had asked three—specially loved, trusted, and honoured by Him—to come and watch with Him, to join their prayers with His in such an hour. And they fell asleep; He found them time after time asleep. That was a hard stroke.

The heart that loves would fain have love

again. That is all it asks—no recompense, no payment but this, that value shall be set on it, that it shall not be despised, set at nought, trifled with. And love so gentle and so faithful as Christ showed to these poor sinful men in those closing days, we find nowhere else—nowhere. Now when He asked—it was His last request,—when He asked these three to watch with Him, as intimating that in the sore crisis of His great sacrifice when He must finally accept all it implied, He would fain think that these three were feeling for Him and praying with Him according to their ability,—when He asked this, it was but to find them again and again asleep.

If you ask the reason, how it could be, it is said at *v.* 43, "He found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy." They were drowsy and so they slept. The evangelist Luke says they were sleeping "for sorrow"; and this may seem to put a better face on the matter. The vicissitudes and anxieties, the hopes and fears, the omens and the warnings of these last days had worn them; they were tired and sorry and perplexed, drowsiness offered a kind of relief, a kind of refuge, and they were glad to embrace it, they did not care to resist it. It was sorrow, but it was a selfish sorrow that took refuge so; if they

had been thinking more of their master's sorrow they could not have slept then, not after that special request, not after that pathetic expostulation. It was human enough, in the sad sense in which so much that is weak and pusillanimous is human. If our Lord's sorrow had been like theirs where would they have been?

There is no need to exaggerate anything. These men did love Christ, and were minded to serve Him. Our Lord, with that love of His which nothing could quench, marked it even then, for He said (*v.* 41) "The spirit, indeed, is willing." There was in these men a principle of real spiritual response to Christ, although at this time it proved so feeble.

Still what had taken place was failure—sad failure. In face of our Lord's special request, and His repeated warning, they had failed—miserably failed. It was a poor business; and so it is a sad voice of rebuke—mild indeed, but not the less impressive—which our Lord addresses to them in the text. "Sleep on now and take your rest." For they had lost the opportunity—it was gone. They might have had the privilege of ministering to our Lord in that hour of darkness. They might have been honoured to give, what in that hour He longed to have, human sympathy,

the fellowship of human supplication. They had lost the opportunity. Angels had come down to minister; but the human sinners, for whom He bore it, slept it out. And now they never could repair the neglect: no watching could avail now. That hour was over; and, so far as they were concerned, their Lord had passed through it alone. Aye, instead of helping or comforting, they had embittered His sorrow and wounded His heart. "Sleep on; it is over now."

Many a time, I think, these words would come back to the minds of these three men. Long years after,—long after the forgiveness which their Master so freely gave them had been sealed upon their hearts,—after they had been honoured to do loving work for Him of which you and I at this day enjoy the fruits, when Peter and John were grey-haired men and almost ripe for glory, there were times, I doubt not, when their hearts swelled with a sorrow that would not be controlled at the remembrance of these words. It may have seemed at the time little else than natural, inevitable, to yield to that drowsiness; but, in those after years, Oh to have watched—ever so feebly, if they had but watched that one hour! But it could never be. Sleep on now, and take your rest. It is one of them, it is Peter, who in

his epistle has addressed to Christians so emphatically the admonition, "Be sober, be vigilant," and who has spoken so largely of the preciousness of being a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. His heart might tell him as he wrote it, that to him had been given an opportunity such as the world's history can never bring to man again of watching with Christ, and of entering into the fellowship of His sufferings; and that he was invited to embrace it by Christ Himself; and that he had cast it away—had cast it away, never to have an opportunity of so serving Christ again, though he might seek it carefully with tears.

This history gives warning and admonition for all ages of the Church. Christ's people are still in danger of giving place to the flesh in the same way; and a similar principle of divine administration takes place in relation to them. This is the main subject on which I propose to speak.

But I will diverge for a moment to speak to another class. Persons who truly love Christ may fall into spiritual sleep. But there are those who live a worldly life, unconverted, untouched by the realities of the kingdom of God. They are in a deeper sleep; and any movement or struggle that has befallen them is more like the confused discomfort of a nightmare than a real awakening.

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Now I keep in view that as long as life on earth lasts the Gospel still appeals to such persons, and it would be false and wrong to discourage any, even those of you who have lived longest in unbelief, from hearkening to it as an instant message to yourselves. And yet this must be said to you, that it is a dangerous sleep in which you are wrapped. There are, in many cases, periods of life and trains of providence that tend, as means, towards awakening and reconciliation; there are times during which the fig-tree receives special care and culture. If such seasons, one after another, pass unimproved, if summer is past and harvest ended in vain, if word and providence fail alike to move the man who prefers a vain dream of life to its reality, then times may come in which men are let alone. There are men in the world who seem to be cursed with unbroken worldly prosperity and undisturbed tranquillity, which nothing interrupts. "Woe unto them when I depart from them." It is as if a voice sounded in their lives, "Sleep on and take your rest"—a short sleep, from which the awaking may be too late. I cannot deal with my proper subject without saying once more to you, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!

But the lesson of my subject is for those whom we must think of as followers of Christ, although for the present their state has come to be too little distinguished from the other class. Followers of Christ may fall, foolishly and culpably, into a state of spiritual sleep—of negligence and inadvertence, so as to neglect plain duties which Christ is requiring them to discharge; they may do so to their own sore loss; and that loss may prove to be irreparable, even after they are themselves forgiven and restored.

This tendency is due to the flesh—that in men which is unready and reluctant to take to do with God and with the things of the spirit; it finds its congenial element in a world in which God is overlooked and left out. The carnal mind is enmity to God, and tendencies which betray its presence, its continued presence, are found in those who have really learned to love the better way. Also, perhaps, our Lord's words suggest to us that there is a weakness of the flesh distinguishable, so far, from its wickedness. It arises from the want of harmony now in man's nature, especially in those relations in which the mind is specially dependent on the body. For the body of our humiliation is not yet renewed. Here is a source of real difficulty with which we have to deal.

Now, whether in the one view or in the other of this working of the "flesh," the calling and the privilege of believers is to overcome it. The believer's calling is to fight the good fight of faith. But by defect in living according to their calling, by negligence and self-indulgence, believers are sometimes betrayed into great sin; and often they suffer themselves to fall drowsily into the arms of a carnal, indolent, self-indulgent frame of mind, into a sleep or slumber of the soul.

Now, let us think a little how the "flesh" works in drawing us into this condition; for the Scripture writers have much to say of it. They speak often of the influences, or of the conditions, under which this sleep overtakes the souls of men.

For example, we find it connected with want of circumspection—the lack of a due sense of danger and due care to avoid it. So in Eph. v. we find the warning, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead," followed up presently by this, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time." Hence also the admonition, "Be sober, be vigilant." Men are beguiled by this, that they do not think of the "fleshly" tendencies within them as watching to betray them. But, indeed,

the flesh does not need to watch. Let the spiritual mind cease to be circumspect, and the flesh, as by an instinct of ungodliness, will work in the way that is fitted to bury us in the world and the things of the world, and so to bring about spiritual insensibility. Therefore our Lord says, "Watch and pray always." Remissness in watching and prayer, through not recognising our danger, is one of the first stages in spiritual slumber.

Furthermore, the flesh abuses our earthly calling and connections and avocations, so as to render us, by and by, insensible to our proper calling as Christians, and this lays us asleep. The apostle says (1 Thess. v.), "Ye are all the children of light, of the day; they that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night, but let us, who are of the day, be sober; let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." But our necessary occupations with the things of earth, instead of being subordinated to our chief end, may more and more come into competition with it, and may work with an intoxicating power. When allowed to take this place they shut out the light, they seduce us from our calling as children of light, they involve us in night and darkness. So comes

spiritual slumber; and it shall be well if we are not entangled in some of the unfruitful works of darkness. The mind slides readily into an undue complacency in the things around us, or an undue anxiety about them—both the complacency on the one hand and the anxiety on the other involving an overdone sense of their importance, and a disposition to idolise them. "Take heed," says our Lord, "lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life. *Watch* ye, therefore."

Again, there is an error which betrays us, in our way of thinking about time. We are apt to think of time as something very long: so that if we waste it now on that which is unprofitable, yet we may make it up again. But in truth the duty of this moment, if neglected now, never can be performed; and, at all events, we shall find our time to be not long, but short. The apostle, therefore (Rom. xiii.) admonishes the Christians to "know the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep—the night is far spent."

Lastly, not to multiply points, there is the example and the contagion of that great society which Scripture calls "the world,"—the mass of those who are awake indeed to business and

pleasure, but as to God are asleep. Through abounding iniquity the love of many waxes cold. "Be not deceived (1 Cor. xv.). Evil communications corrupt good manners. *Awake* to righteousness and sin not."

These are only instances. In many ways those, who know better, may be beguiled into spiritual sloth, indolence, and slumber, to the neglect of duties to which Christ calls them, and of work which He gives them to do. I have said that by this they suffer loss; now the loss may be irreparable, even if they are forgiven and restored. It is to be owned indeed that our Lord is a gracious master, patient and long-suffering, not dealing with us after our sins. He heals backslidings; He redeems our life from destruction. Yet also, it is part of His discipline, sometimes very visible, to let sin and folly reveal themselves in their consequences in the case of men who have been warned in vain. This is what I have to speak of in these closing words.

Among the duties to which Christ calls any one of His people, are those which directly concern the man himself—his own character, his spiritual prosperity and progress. Again, there are those which concern others in the Church or in the world.

Now as to the first class, these duties are, no doubt, always incumbent; but there are special seasons in which a special diligence is to be expected, and in which special encouragements are held out to us. It may be that the providences of God in our lives come home with a strong admonition as to the true ends of life, and as to the decision with which they ought to be pursued. It may be that somehow, we know not how, a clearer view than heretofore arises in the mind, of the scenery so to say, of the spiritual world. The great objects of faith become more luminous; the road to be taken becomes more plain; the meaning of "following Christ" reveals itself as it had not done before. Or it may be that the heart is specially touched—impressions of God's kindness, perceptions of the incomparable worth of salvation, relentings, and repentant feelings may visit the soul; and a new sense of what is possible in the spiritual life, may arise; because we feel Christ to be near, and we cannot doubt His willingness to bless us, if we will turn to Him heartily. These are opportunities for great things being done; for a new order of attainment being reached; for besetting sins being overcome and trampled down. Progress might be made at such a time, that should influence all the after

life. It might be the beginning of our advance in a new spirit, of our rising to a platform of Christian living never reached before, more consistent, more fruitful, and more happy.

Now these opportunities may be embraced: also they may be neglected. We may be pleased, so far, with the influence that visits us, and yet we may not like the decision, the trouble, the effort, implied in an honest and faithful response to the call which has thus become audible. It may be neglected. But if it is neglected, then we need not wonder if by and by we have to feel the consequences, and to feel them bitterly;—either in a lively sense of the absence of the blessing we neglected to take hold of; or, yet more sadly, in being left in a dull dead routine, in which there is a sense indeed that matters are going ill with us, and yet there seems hardly life enough to inquire into the cause or cure of the evil.

Not unfrequently, awakening visitations, either outward or inward, are sent with a view to this, that we may be the better prepared for more special duties, or more special trials that are coming. Or some lesser trial—some opportunity of partaking in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, which *may* be avoided, but ought to be embraced—is sent to prepare the way for some greater one,

which is inevitable. And if the call is neglected by the soul, which prefers to slumber, then when the greater trial comes and finds us unprepared, bewildered, darkened, unable to "find our hands," we are made to read our sin in our punishment. We may be left then in great extremity to learn —we who have despised our mercies—how precious and how indispensable they are. For "to him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not even that which he seemeth to have shall be taken away."

An obvious example we have in the case of Peter. Trial was before him: he was to be put to proof as to the open confession of Christ his Lord, in the presence of his enemies. And if he had been heedful to walk with Christ in Gethsemane through that hour in "the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, being made conformable to His death," who shall say how far it might have availed to make him ready afterwards to witness the good confession, through all that might befall him? But he shrank from it; he thought perhaps he had had enough of anxiety and sorrow, and might be excused from more. He was weary, and he slept. And so he lost what might have been his safeguard. Let this be remembered by us, when we are called to unwelcome duties from which we feel inclined to

shrink, that these may be our proper training for duties and trials coming, from which we cannot escape, in which we must either come through by faith as good soldiers of Christ, or must signally fall.

There are also—to refer to this before we close —duties to which Christ calls His people, which concern the weal of others; duties to the Church of Christ, to its state and to its work; duties also to individuals to whom we have special providential ties. It is inexpressible how often and how much Christians are content to slumber over these. I will say nothing now about the Church; I speak only of individuals; and the responsibility in this respect is specially plain in the cases of those whom God has set together in families.

God is the author of families; and He ordered family life that He might seek a godly seed. If those who make a profession of attachment to the cause of Christ were making any fit use of their opportunities in this way, should we not see better times and greater progress? They are opportunities that should be used wisely, advisedly. But they should be used. And I have no doubt at all that many of you, with prayer, and with thoughtfulness, have tried to use them. Yet I have also no doubt that there is here great failure, and that some of you are evincing a cruel indiffer-

ence to the welfare of those whose welfare should be dear to you. You flinch, partly because you don't know how it may be taken, chiefly because you are averse to be stirred up to that realisation of divine things in your own hearts, which alone would make it natural or reasonable to speak of them to others. Perhaps I am speaking to the conscience of some of you when I say this; and perhaps you have gone on thus for years, as if time should have no end; and you are like to go on so still, for the habit has become inveterate through long usage.

Well, my brethren,—sleep on. But a time may come when you would give all the world not to have slept. At some future day, when you are at last awake, when you have other impressions than now you have of the worth and the awe of eternal realities, you may have to think of some who may then be gone—gone with sad doubts hanging over their condition,—some who, while they lived, lived by your side, walked side by side with you on their journey to the unseen world; and you never spoke to them about Christ and life eternal, with anything like the earnestness with which you often spoke to them of their worldly interests. Then, in the bitterness of self-condemnation, you may long for one more hour—you may yearn for another

opportunity in which your heart might speak; you may, as it were, cry out for it; but you shall have no answer,—no answer from the green, voiceless grave, no answer from the dark eternity which you cannot enter, no answer from God, whose creature you neglected, no answer save this, Sleep on and take your rest. You might have watched once, and prayed and acted; you had years to do it in; you shall never have another opportunity; you slept then, now sleep on and take your rest.

Ah! and it was Christ—Christ of whom you say that He is your Saviour, that by His incarnation and His sorrow He delivered you. He set that sinner by your side. He said to you, be instant for him, be faithful to him, it may be you shall be the messenger of life to him. Yet love to Christ and compassion for man could not avail to keep you from sleep. Now, then, sleep on.

My friends, how many ways does the admonition come to us, in how many points do we need to take it home! It is high time for us to awake out of sleep. For your own souls, for the souls of others, for the Church of God, be sober, be vigilant. "Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord." "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."

VII

CHRIST'S MOTHER AND BRETHREN.

"Behold my mother and my brethren!"—MARK iii. 31-34 (*v.* 34).

OUR Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of man, the man Christ Jesus. He appeared on earth, not merely as one among the multitude of men, but as a new root and head of human nature. He came, not for the narrow circle of a family or a neighbourhood, but for men, in order to sustain relations and hold connection with innumerable sinners. Over against all men He stands, and stands alone, the man Christ Jesus.

Yet, being true man, He was born of a woman, and so was the member of an earthly household. He was made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, so he accepted the ties of family life. As true man He was not exempt from anything that is human and sinless. Rather, whatever belonged to the glory of human nature in its unfallen prime.

existed in Him, in all its original vigour and grace and tenderness. So, no doubt, He owned the right of family affections. There was a home, there was a circle, very dear to Him. Such affections, indeed, existed in Him wisely, and subject to no excess; and in that home and circle, no doubt, there was sin enough to make it a place of trial, sacrifice, crucifixion to the pure soul of Jesus. Yet family affection must have held its place in Him with peculiar tenderness and warmth, with all that rooted strength which God assigned it, when He ordained the ties which bind families together. The power of loving which characterised Christ was not likely to flow feebly in any of the channels in which God's providence appointed it to flow. The ties that twine themselves about the souls of men in families, as days and years go on, were not renounced by Him. Only we must remember that along with the human affections, whatever they were, that dwelt in Christ, there was always, in a measure that we can very feebly apprehend, another love, the love to His Father and His God. That grew as His mind grew in capacity, filling it ever to the brim, giving law and bound to every other feeling. It did not make the others less tender or true, but it imparted to every other an abiding purity and

innocence, holding all in a perfect order. It is because we can so little measure this element by any experience of ours that we know, and can know, so little of the inward experience of the man Christ Jesus.

Still, as we have said, He *was* a man placed in human relations and exercised in human affections. We may judge that throughout the time of His living privately, as He was subject to His mother and His reputed father, so also He fully owned and responded to every natural claim of kindred and blood. For we see from several passages that His relatives, according to the flesh, dealt with Him quite in the manner in which those might do who were accustomed to be treated with the frankness, intimacy, and trust of near relationship.

It is interesting to consider how these natural relations with their attendant feelings come forward in the gospel history, and what our Lord's procedure was in reference to this part of His experience.

Now several incidents place our Lord in the attitude of one who puts a negative on the claims made on Him by His earthly kindred. He seems to break or to renounce the bonds between them and Him on which they relied. In spite of the

air of unkindness which might seem to attach to such conduct, we see Him standing off from them, especially when they sought to exert influence upon Him.

For indeed He had often to suppress and set aside the ties that bound Him to *some*, according to the flesh, in order that He might fully sustain His great position as the Saviour of mankind; and it need not surprise us to find Him doing so again and again as His life proceeds. Before He entered on any public work, we know that He stood ever ready to subordinate all to His Father's will. The incident connected with His first visit to the Temple shows this strikingly. But especially when He had entered on His public work, He made it emphatically plain that no ties of the kind I speak of were to be allowed to hamper or to sway Him in the discharge of it. When He manifested His glory in that first miracle at Cana of Galilee, His mother's interference was rebuked gently, indeed, but firmly. There was, doubtless, nothing needlessly severe, no uncalled-for estrangement; but there was a decided repression of the liberties of near relationship. And the reason for it has been indicated. He was no way wanting in the regard due to family and kindred. But there were on earth and among men other ties

which He counted stronger; there was another circle nearer and dearer; another set of obligations held Him to which all else must give way. He had come to be to mankind, and especially to all that should believe, something nearer, far nearer, than to be the son of one or the brother of others.

In our Lord's experience the collision or competition between these two became more distinct, inasmuch as the influence of His friends, the influence which, as they judged, they might reasonably exercise, was set against the ardour of His love and labour in the work given Him to do. In any case, we may well believe that the hearts of those who were around Him, narrow, worldly, contracted in comparison with His, would fail to rise up to a due sympathy with Him, or to understand the intensity of feeling, the devotedness of labour and sacrifice, which *He* judged suitable to be bestowed upon His mission. In any case, even if there had been no active opposition, there could not but be, on the part of His friends, the constant manifestation of a frame of mind alien from His, the expectation of something from Him as reasonable, natural, becoming, which did not please Him. Those around Him could not but betray, again and again, a state of mind half surprised, half hurt; that touch

of disappointment and misunderstanding which grieves an affectionate spirit, and often tempts it to make some compromise rather than bear the pain of alienation. But besides this, we know positively that His brethren "did not believe in him," and could not of course but make their unbelief apparent; and in the incidents of this chapter we have a specimen of the difficulties which, from this quarter, were thrown in His way.

We find that He was at this time very busily engaged in teaching. So large were the multitudes, so many the sick, so great the opportunities of instruction, that there was no time for ordinary refreshment. This zealous work was regarded with blasphemous spite by the Pharisees, who said: "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." But even those of His own house wished to remove Him away, as one carried out of Himself by zeal and enthusiasm. His friends said: "He is beside himself." So prompt and confident are men to judge, that everything which interferes with the ordinary accidents of the life which is all in all to them is mere mad disturbance, which must be at once arrested and put down.

Notwithstanding this, our Lord's benevolent ministry went on that day without intermission.

But by and by, while He is still engaged in teaching, His mother and His brethren stand without seeking access to Him; either, as we may believe, for the purpose of directly dissuading Him from further efforts, or for the purpose of at least diverting Him by their presence and known wishes, and bringing His thoughts and feelings into more homely and everyday channels.

Whatever unbelief there was in this attempt, there is no reason to doubt that, in its way, it was kindly meant. One recognises the feeling that His relations were the natural guardians of His health and weal, and that they might reasonably exercise a care of some particulars, which in His self-sacrificing zeal He might neglect. It is not necessary to suppose His mother, for example, to have gone all that length in unbelief indicated by the expression—"He is beside himself." But there might be, short of this, a feeling awakened in her mind too, as if His labours were becoming excessive, and as if the popular excitement (sure to be attended with aggravated enmity and bitterness on the part of the Pharisees) was becoming too great.

Now, you observe, *that* on which they relied, when they sought to influence Him in this direction, was His affectionate feeling towards them as

His relatives. They relied on this, and on the confidence He might be expected to have, that however they and He differed in judgment, their anxiety about Him betokened their affection for Him. It was as if they had said, "Whatever claim His work and His hearers have upon Him, we surely have some claim and some hold. We are His own flesh and blood. He will not altogether disregard our anxiety, nor resist the pressure of our wishes. He may not concede *all* we desire, but He will, He must, concede something." So they stood without desiring to speak with Him. The natural affection of those who were naturally nearest to Him (allied at this time, no doubt, with much unbelief and presumption) stood at the door seeking access to Him; and word was passed in that so it was, and one within reported it to Jesus.

How does our Lord meet and deal with it? By ignoring this claim of theirs, and counting it for nothing at all. He gives it no entertainment and no place. He repels it simply and entirely. He will have nothing to do with it. He will know nothing of this mother and these brethren. They—they are not My mother, not My brethren—I have others that have higher claims. So absolutely is this claim and instance of theirs slain, and ended with a word.

"What!" one may say, "but was there no place for natural affection,—for the acknowledgment of its nearness and its right to a hearing, even if it were unwise—even when it was very unwise? Was not this harsh in our Lord?"

There *was* a place for natural affection; and in that place our Lord's affections were deeper, stronger, tenderer than yours. But here, on this holier, dearer, tenderer ground, their appearance, their asking for a hearing, had all the offensiveness of the intrusion of pretenders, that dared to tread on ground too sacred for their feet. They must be simply dismissed and banished. It might be painful to our Lord; through the affection which He bore them, those He loved might unwisely subject Him to much pain. But if so, it was pain simply to be borne, as for our sake He bore all pain. If here they sought to make good their footing through their hold on our Lord's sinless affections, these affections must be simply and promptly crucified, and the intruders must be repelled.

This was but an instance of a class of experiences through which our Lord must often have passed, at various times and with great variety in the circumstances—the experience of letting go, as it were, those natural ties and bonds, crushing

the natural impulses, which those about Him, (consciously or unconsciously), sought to make fetters for His activity, or cords to drag Him aside from His proper path. He became a stranger even to His mother, and His mother's sons. It is harder to make up the mind to this, and to carry it out through days and years, than once to submit to a domestic loss however great. It was hard to deny Himself the quiet rest of home in the free flow of tranquil feeling—to love His relations and yet hold them at bay,—and this was our Lord's exercise.

It was so, because *their* love was far too carnal, unbelieving, and unwise to be allowed to take hold of Him at its will; yea, sometimes was so broadly unbelieving in its manifestations, that He must be ever ready, in such cases, to throw it back rejected, as that with which He would have no fellowship, to which He would give no hearing. It had to be thrown back, as that which insulted and profaned the dearest and deepest feelings of His holy soul —He had to say, "I love you, indeed; yet know, and learn the lesson, that in some sense I love you not at all."

This is He who is the Lord of Providence, and the administrator of the affairs of all His people, and when He sees fit to order things so that any

earthly affection of ours is wounded or bereaved—when He judges that the glory of God or the good of His children requires that the pruning-knife shall be applied to some too luxuriant growth of home comfort, it is fit that we should remember that He knows perfectly well the pain of it, and perfectly well also the vast benefit that may be reaped from it. *He* reached the salvation of all the saved, walking in this path.

But yet further, not only does our Lord thus, as it were, reject and repel the intrusion of His earthly relatives; we have to observe the views and feelings under which He does so, as indicated by His own words; "Who is my mother and my brethren?" He looked round, He stretched out His hand (as Matthew has it) and said, "Behold my mother and my brethren!" "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

There were others, then—not at all His relatives *as such*—who had, of all creatures, the nearest place and the deepest love. It was the law of His being and office that they should, it was the breathing and the will of His whole heart that they should. From relatives He might part. The bonds that bound them to Him, tender as they were, might be severed, yea, Himself might sever

them, and take the pain and trembling of the flesh as part of His appointed trial. But there were some not to be parted from, there were bonds not to be broken. As if one should say, Is there a place in the heart, the inmost, the dearest that a creature can hold? Is there a love the most durable, tender, and tenacious? Are there claims, relationships, which the whole nature rises up to assert and maintain—maintaining which it may die, but will not let them go? Then Christ says, that place, that love, that relationship belong not to mother nor to brethren; or if they do, if there is no dearer and no kindlier name than these household names to give to those that are so dear, then *who* are My mother and My brethren? They are *these*, they are all who do the will of My Father in Heaven. The same is My brother and sister and mother.

Those on the earth who do His Father's will; those whose hearts His Father's word has persuaded; those who are acting from the new principle (which was Christ's own) of loving and hearkening to the Father's will—these are the family of the sons of God, these are forever, to the heart of Christ, His own household relatives, His more than flesh and blood. The bond that binds them to Him and commends them to His love

goes deeper than the flesh and than the earthly life. It is like that incomprehensible bond which binds Him, the Son of Man, to the Father. The doers of His Father's will in this evil world, to these His heart went out and clave as His true, and in a sense, His only kindred. With them only He was not altogether alone—not altogether a stranger.

"Who do the will of my Father which is in heaven." Do you say, "But this sounds very high. I hear it and then look round upon my life; and I dare not, with that in view, make mention so much of the *doing*, as of the grievous mangling and marring, attempting and failing, forgetting and leaving undone the Father's will. How can a man deal with this?"

But consider, "these"—was that houseful of hearers all so far advanced—all so holy?

Earnest listeners, they were pondering the words of Christ and sitting at His feet. But we are very sure that dark minds and slow hearts and mixed characters were there; yet He excludes none. He looks round on that crowd of hearers and says, "*these*"—"Behold my mother and my brethren!"

And this indeed sets us at the right point of view for contemplating the mind of Christ in this

expression. For on the one hand we see that the doing of His Father's will is to be taken in all its scriptural latitude, as it begins with this: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." This is the beginning, the seed. Fruit springs of this; but in the case of many of those then present, there might be little more than the mere germination of that seed begun in the heart—the first awaking and turning of the soul to Christ. But Christ saw that leaven; deep and secret as it might be, He knew whence it came, and what should come of it. He despised not the day of small things in the case of those who were but beginning to feel the preciousness of His words, and to place confidence in Him as God's messenger. He frankly claimed them for His kindred, as the doers of His Father's will.

And on the other hand we have here opened up to us the warmth and depth of our Lord's feelings.

It was not *merely* as one morally and spiritually *like* the doers of His Father's will that He claimed kindred so earnestly with those to whom He gave that name. It was not only because they, like Him, were, so far, spiritually right in disposition and in practice. That was not all. It was as a Saviour, their Saviour, that He felt towards them.

He saw in each of them the result and reward of His own interposition. He saw in each, a soul beginning to be rescued from death, from sin, from everlasting rebellion and misery by His love, His blood, His Spirit. And in their very imperfections, in that, as yet, but germinating regard to His Father's will, He saw, He could not but see, what made Him the more earnest to assert His interest in them. Yes, they had much to learn, very much, and He was to teach it all to them; much sin to be forgiven, and His blood was to wash them clean; strong indwelling evil clouding and possessing their souls, and He was to overcome it and at last put an end to it; there was great shortcoming every way, and He was to bring all to completeness. For they were His, and He was redeeming them, living for them, teaching them, going on to die for them. And they were just catching sight of His true character and responding to His call. He had begun the good work in them; and as they sat listening round Him, and as He went on, careless of food and rest, instilling into their minds the word of the kingdom, it was with a kind of holy resentment that He proclaimed that no earthly relations should pretend for a moment to be so dear to Him as these. It is a wonderful thing to see

how the heart of Christ rises up to assert the right of these believing sinners to be loved by Him, or at least, His strong right to love them well. It is wonderful to see how, with a holy vehemence, He claims to hold them as the dearest of all, and to treat them as such. That dearest place which any creature could hold in the heart of Christ, belongs to these. Imperfect, very imperfect as they may be, they are His to love, and His to teach, His to bear with, to sanctify, to save. These are His mother and His brethren—and as for His earthly relatives, let them not presume to come between.

Not indeed that there is anything harsh or exclusive to them; only He must teach them a needed lesson. They also might be in the circle of His true kindred; Mary already was, and in more believing hours she felt it; the brethren, in wiser days that followed, came to be—but not *as* His earthly relations, presuming on those earthly ties, but only as sinners, believing by grace on Him whom God had sent, and received by Him who casts out none that come.

Thus our Lord opens up to us the peculiar love which He bears as a Saviour to those who follow Him; the love which secured, and which accomplishes their salvation. He was no way

insensible to natural ties: the dearness of kindred, the fellowships of home, the charm and magic of gathering associations that entwine themselves round human hearts and link them together—He was subject to them all and felt them all. He felt them, not reluctantly as some pedantic philosopher, but with all the open love of a perfect man. He could enter into all such feelings. He wept with a sister at her brother's grave, when others stood round with their cold, talkative sympathy: and yet, all this was as it were nothing—nothing to His love for those sinners whom He was making to know their sin, and drawing to Himself for teaching. "Behold my mother and my brethren!"

It is still thus, and when you go to Christ in your ignorance and unworthiness, believe that it is this love you go to. Less would not save you. There are times when you feel as if you could wish to pour out your heart to some very near, tenderly loving friend—a mother perhaps—one whose love never failed you, and you do not think it can. Only there are things that lie on the heart, to tell of which might only vex the love that is not able to help. But in Christ, who is able to help, there meets you, not such a love, but a love to which that is even nothing: the

Saviour's love which put aside mother and brethren according to the flesh, the love that none but that Saviour knows, a love that stands up mightily to assert its right to receive you and bless you, and abide with you for ever.

When you consider the doing of the Father's will, that high and blessed course, as it begins with believing on Him whom He hath sent, and goes on in a narrow way, furnished with many great and precious promises,—as you consider it, is it nothing to consider that it is this love, this only love, which stands at the door, and this which accompanies you all the way you go?

If you cannot take it in, it is pride that hinders you.

Finally, this love is not only given but received —it is welcomed and embraced by Christ's "mother and brethren."

Therefore, every believer (once cut off from God and from good) has a relation nearer, much nearer than any earthly relative—more necessary to his wellbeing, and also more necessary to his heart. This is his Saviour, his soul's Friend and Lord. I do not say that a believer will at all times have the lively sense of Christ's preciousness to him, in the same vivid way in which he may at times feel the dearness of some earthly relative.

That may be influenced by circumstances. But substantially there will be the supreme and fundamental tie to this friend whose relationship is of another kind from those which pertain to the flesh—higher, dearer, and eternal. There is One above all others, who well deserves the name of Friend—and it is our union to Him that unites us to God. This is every way and on every account the one thing needful, that our friendship with Him should be living and wakeful, and that His work as Saviour should be advancing in our souls.

When, therefore, He sees fit to remove any of our earthly relatives, often with a very gentle hand, He calls us only to something of His own experience. He calls us to consider whether we have been watchful to give Him *His* place, who was so jealous to keep *our* place for us: and He calls us to improve His dealings with us, by giving ourselves to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge—that we may be filled with the fulness of God.

But, lastly, Christ calls us to Him, in order to make us doers of His Father's will. For that we come to Him, for that we abide with Him. Already, in believing on Him we agree to it, we

begin it, but to learn how great that will is, and what it is to do it, is work for a devoted life. Have we consented that this shall be our business, are we true scholars in this school, do we reckon this and nothing else to be our personal success in life, that we *succeed* in learning the will of God and in doing it? This is supremely great. Try yourselves. Do not trifle with it. Christ was not trifling when He said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." "He that *doeth the will* of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

VIII

THE ELDER SON

"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."—LUKE xv. 31.

IT will be agreed that, in this parable, the introduction of the elder son is intended mainly to bring out yet more clearly the mind of the father, whom we have seen so warmly welcoming back the prodigal. This need not, indeed, be the only object in view. Still, in this latter part of the parable the mind of the father is illustrated by setting beside it the mind of the elder brother, as in the previous part it was set over against the thoughts and deeds of the younger son. We are to learn the father's mind, partly by contrast with the mind of the elder brother, which, therefore, it were well for us to understand. So one asks, Whose type have we here? To whom, in the meaning of Jesus, is this mood ascribed, that rises before

us, parabolically, in the person of the elder brother?

Probably the answer may be, This stands for any case and every case in which objection to the Father's mercy is raised from the point of view of professed obedience, of comparatively inoffensive life; every case in which the comparative claims of those who have not gone astray, or have not gone so far astray, make appearance to contest the fitness of showing so much goodwill to the prodigal. For, indeed, you see, the prodigal seems to be made welcome to the best of everything; is there anything a son could have, the best of sons, from which he is shut out? Well, is that really fitting? Or, if it is, where is the corresponding demonstration appropriate, one would think, for some other people who are not prodigals? That is the point of view supposed, and it does not matter, in one way of looking at it, in whose mouth it speaks, in whose person it shapes itself into complaint and protest. From whatever mouth, in whatever mood proposed, here it shall have its spokesman, and here its answer. If this kind of grudge against the reception of the returning wanderer is to have place, let the spokesman be a son who never left his father's house and never was turned out of it; let him speak,

and let us see how his plea will look ; still more, let us hear what the father will say to it.

For a hundred different persons from a hundred different standpoints might take up the cause of this injured elder son, and argue for him. Many a voice may be heard speaking here. It may be one who is not thinking about his own standing, and who does not care about it—whether he is like the one son or like the other, or like neither ; unawakened and careless, he is a mere bystander, criticising. He signifies his disapprobation of all this fuss over the prodigal son by the word or thought, "Well, if he had been the best son on earth, no more could have been done for him." Or, this grudge may be one thread in the tangled web of feeling of one who knows very well where *he* is ; he is in the far country ; there is no doubt of it ; and his heart is sore and bitter and hard ; his pride is still unbroken, and his self-will is still staunch, and unbelief in the mercy to which he will not yet betake himself indulges this fling at the Gospel, this amid many more that are heaving in his heart, that it seems to be a kind of sentimental injustice. Again, it may be some one who also is far enough from God, yet he trusts in himself that he is righteous ; he is at peace in his own self-esteem, therefore is incapable of under-

standing God's ways. He may not *say*—he may even keep from exactly *thinking*, "I am the son that never sinned," but he has a very strong impression that such welcome and bounty and celebration as are here set before us, would have been better kept for better people. Ah, my friends, and perhaps some may find themselves here who are nearer God than that, some who know God better and owe Him much. These too may be aware at times of a movement of offence, of surprise, a touch or pulse of jarring feeling, a coldness, a dulness, a holding back, when the Father's house is astir with such a gladness as the parable describes; and it is a coldness which means something, though the man himself may shrink from owning how much it means. Or, shall we imagine that such an utterance might come from some honest, some loyal but narrow mind—a movement if not of protest, yet of perplexed and, as it were, aggrieved inquiry, as to how this should be so? Or shall we think it possible that somewhere in the universe some student of the ways of God, outside of our race, without a thought of personal interest or of personal competition, but looking as a student into the remarkable and moving picture, might say to himself, "Well, now, but suppose there were another son, who did not forsake his

father's house, could he feel all this to be quite equitable"? And so on; a hundred ways one may suppose the question raised. Very well; let us have this elder son; let him speak for himself. Here he is; here is his speech, strong, earnest, spoken to a Father who will hear reason, if there is reason in the case. Let us hear him, above all, that we may also hear the answer, and may the better learn the Father's thoughts which are to usward.

The speaker comes before us, observe, as a son, the elder son. It is not suggested that he is no son, or that his sonship is questionable or lost. Rather, we are to take it that the privileges and benefits of his sonship are unquestioned, that so it may the more clearly appear how far the attitude he takes is congruous to these. You and I may think that we could prove that the state of mind he discloses really amounts to a fall from true sonship, or to renunciation of it. But however ingenious you or I may be, that is not the ground assumed in the parable. Let it be a son who shall speak. But yet, if so, he must be a son who is in the mood to make his speech in these terms. Therefore he must be a son who is thinking much of himself, and is greatly occupied with interests of his own. He is full of his own rights

and claims. And be sure of this, that a mind which shapes its complaint as that is here presented, is turning away from trust in the Father and from loving insight into the Father's mind. Let it be a son, then, who has never pained his father by a defiant outbreak of rebellion or apostasy. Yet he is a son before whose mind has risen up—in whose mind has taken root the idea of a separate interest of his own; separate from his brother's, separate from his father's. It is an interest which it is his part to reckon up, to guard, to make sure of. He is not going to assert it in a wild burst of self-indulgence; rather, perhaps, he takes credit to himself that he has been willing to keep it in the background, and to give effect meanwhile to the claims of his father's service. Still he has been keeping it in view; and the longer he waits the better right he has, as he thinks, to assert it emphatically some day. And he has felt the years of service strengthening the position, and building up the claim. "'These many years do I serve thee; never did I break thy commandment; yet thou never gavest me a kid. But when this thy son is come with all his lamentable history behind him, then every resource is drawn upon to express the joy."

The answer is, Are you my son? Are you *not*

my son? If you knew how it really stands between me and you, you never could say *that*. "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

First, "Thou art ever with me." This father realises the meaning of the fellowship to which he received his son, and which his son should have realised. It was a fellowship constant, unhindered, meant to endure. The father never grudged it, never obstructed it, never set limits to it. A wonderful companionship is here suggested. The fellowship that in happy cases may subsist between earthly sons and fathers just conveys a hint of what here comes into view, a hint and no more. For in the best of such cases there are limits: and as a son growing up, must pass out from the position of dependence, must, however considerately and wisely, assert his manhood, so no earthly father is great or good enough to claim an absolute and perpetual loyalty. But here a relation is suggested existing free from those limits. It exists in an experience of trust and love unqualified. So it is, at least, on the father's side. He speaks as who should say, Am I not your father? Have you not access to all I am—my thoughts, my tastes, my plans, my procedure? Have I not made it my delight to share it all with you, for you are my son and you are ever with me? Now, if life be

more than meat, surely this is nearer to the heart of life—is more to enrich and gladden it—than any particular gifts. All this is plain if this is a father whose favour is life, who knows that his son's welfare cannot be divorced from fellowship with himself. But if the son's mind had here answered to the father's, would he have been set so much on establishing his own estate? Would he have made so little of the unbroken companionship, the confiding fellowship, which endured for him when estrangement and separation befel his brother? Certainly, if he could, or if he can perceive how real, how dear a privilege has been his, suspicion and sense of wrong must be banished. For indeed if he had only shared, as he might have shared, his father's way of thinking about the wanderer; if he could only have felt with his father how "meet" it was to be glad over the return of him who was the son of the one, and the brother of the other, that would have far more ennobled and enriched him than any gifts could do, bestowed to feast his friends. The father sees it so. He expresses it so as to make plain not only what the son might have felt—but also on his own side how freely and gladly he gave himself to that companionship which the son seems to prize so little. "Son, thou art ever with me."

"And all that I have is thine": not only full fellowship, but also community of interests. There is nothing of mine that is not yours; the good of it is for you. "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." This is the inheritance of the sons of God. It is a great domain, very fair, and stretching far. The administration of it may be—must be, in the Father's hands; but all the more certainly on that account all *was* the son's—all that could profitably be his so as to yield him any good, passed into his possession and enjoyment. And if anything seemed to be withheld, that was because as yet the training was only in progress and the time was not ripe. Meanwhile it was this son's privilege to feel—he *should* have felt—that instead of a measured portion to carry away with him from the father's house and fellowship, like the younger son, whatever the father had, and whatever the father did with it, in every act and step, was really his; because he was admitted to interest and partnership in it all.

Every way, in fellowship and in communication, the more a child comes to his proper character in relation to a perfect father—in relation to *this* perfect Father, the more he will feel it his part to claim glad interest in all that his Father is and

has and does. For, at all events, there need be no doubt about the Father's heart. He does not fail to manifest on His side the spirit proper to such a relation. "Son thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

We see, then, a son who reveals his failure to understand, to appreciate his own privilege, his own blessedness. Alas, it is not one son only of whom this is true. If not always quite in the same way, the Father still finds Himself unworthily dealt with by His own children.

First of all let us emphasise this: in the words of this passage we have, set before us, the state of God's children. It must be emphasised, because we are so prone to indulge our unbelief, under the pretence of being too modest to take seriously God's truths and promises. But this is that to which we are called, that to which we come by the word and faith of the Gospel. This is the divine conception of the state of God's children: this is His way of thinking and feeling about it.

The children of God are "with Him." They have their fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. It is their life to have it; and God delights to grant it. It is no pleasure to God to find His children distant, estranged,

insensible to His glory, unbelieving of His love, unready to pour out their hearts before Him. His design is to have them as permanent members of His own family, bound to Him in a fellowship of worthy love. He would make them privy to His thoughts, sharers in His affections, intimate with His purposes. And He would lead them into this great experience, not always perhaps by what they may count the easiest methods, but by what He sees to be the best.

And all that is His is theirs; for they are "heirs of God." The actual possession and enjoyment can come to pass only by degrees, for men must be fitted for it. But all good that really *can* be theirs, God holds Himself ready to bestow. Or, rather, they are to find their way into a conscious and peaceful property in all that God is and does and has. It is all theirs, for He is theirs —their own God.

All this is really so. It is apprehended by faith, and it is partly seen and partly unseen. But so far as unseen it is still to be believed. It *might* be believed.

All comes to pass for us through Christ, that true and perfect Son. He adequately fills the Son's place, and in that place He cherished the perfect sense of what the Father was to Him, of

what He was to the Father. He knew the Father. He abode always with the Father. Whatsoever the Father had was His. "All works of the Father He wrought likewise. Redeeming sinners by His death and uniting them to Himself, He brings the great company of brethren into the happy, the actual, position of forgiven and recognised children. He, who had the best right to plead peculiar claims, becomes Himself the channel through which the fulness of divine goodwill reaches all the rest.

There is no failure of Sonship with Him. But with us, who claim benefit and sonship through Him, oh how possible for us to be blind, deaf, insensible, estranged from the blessedness which He has made ours! It is part of our evangelical faith to think of ourselves as saved by the mercy which welcomes back prodigals. But alas for us, if we have only come from the mad wilfulness of the prodigal to the starved Pharisaism of this elder son!

For there are those who possess only the name of sons, while untouched either by the call of the Father or the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. They wear easily the Christian name; but life goes on with them undisturbed by any question of relation to God. Yet the grace of this sonship is knocking

at their doors; and there is that between God and them which ought to take shape no otherwise than in the blessed sonship through Christ. But it is all disbelieved, neglected. He calls and they have not regarded.

But not these only, and not these chiefly, have to be thought of. Alas, no. In the case of the best of us is there nothing here in which our hearts condemn us?

To be sons of God, privileged to be ever with Him and to have for ours that which is His —such is our calling, such our professed faith. How, then, shall we justify, and how explain our self-seeking, the occupation of our minds with treasure laid apart for ourselves, our delight in self-pleasing, self-indulgent life that spends itself among the things that pass away? How shall we justify our faint impression, our low desires, our fluctuating principles in regard to Him? True, we are not called to withdraw ourselves from the detail of earthly life. Earthly life is the sphere in which our fellowship with the Father should take place. But where is the glad readiness to take God our Father with us through that life, and to own that it is first of all His, and only under that condition is also ours? No wonder that our sympathy with the Father's mind towards

the lost is cold and questioning, when we realise so faintly what the Father is to ourselves!

And what shall we say of our unbelief—the unbelief that persists—after all that God has done for us, after all the tokens of His goodwill that should sustain our faith? When things go with us otherwise than we should naturally desire, when trials come, when burdens are imposed, when these do not pass away but continue, when our desires about them are superseded by the arrangements of a higher wisdom which call for faith,—ah, what murmuring, what grudging and repining, how hard we count it! Why should not we be indulged as some other children are, and be spared the trials that perplex us? As if our sonship in Christ were not constituted on the principle of a trust in Him which is to triumph over difficulties!

My friends, if God makes us His children in Christ, saying, "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters," let us bethink us what that means, and how it becomes us to carry ourselves in a relation that is so wonderful,—with what meekness, with what trust, with what faithful affection. Let us put away all thoughts of God as if He were one who, from a great distance, and in a wholesale way, dispenses a

general benevolence to a crowd of human beings, in which, however, we may find it needful to look out sharply and fight for our own share. That is not it at all. If Nature discloses no more, certainly grace has another message. If we know anything of sonship then we know that we are called to a personal fellowship with God, which faith is to embrace and experience; and we are allowed to claim interest, for our benefit, for our honour and our profit, in everything that is His. Being dealt with so let us be stirred up to render again according to this grace—which we can do only as we yield up ourselves believingly to our Father's goodness, as we consent with all our hearts to find our treasure and our home in Him.

My friends, when God would awaken and deliver us by a true, by a more than usually deep repentance, from our unbelief, our earthly mindedness, our idolatries, our estrangement from Himself, our absorption in separate interests of our own, He has many instrumentalities at His disposal; and He puts them in play with a Fatherly considerateness and wisdom,—yet steadfastly—careful of our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Words of God come to us with startling power, shedding a sudden light on the unsatisfactory

state of things within us; awakening providences break into our lives; bereavements make us lonely, losses make us thoughtful, slow and lingering cares that we cannot shake off force us to cast about for truer comfort and support. Even temptations and falls startle us into fresh thoughts of where we stand and whither we are going. Also, there are gentle and suasive influences; prayers are remarkably heard, help in time of need is remarkably given, kindnesses come in to touch and draw the heart. Such things God works oftentimes with men.

But when the discipline is to be completed and carried to some result, then a great and Holy Presence comes upon the scene—is felt coming, perhaps, as He never had done before. It is the Holy Spirit. He comes to melt and break the heart and to kindle its repentings together, that He may lift the life on to a new platform of purpose and attainment. And the means He takes is to bring home to the heart the love of God, our own Father in Christ. That is shed abroad in the heart through the Holy Ghost given to us. Its reality, its holy purity, its sincerity and gentleness and faithfulness, its wonderful nearness and dearness, open themselves, at last, to our slow hearts. As this is felt rising before us, and

surrounding us, and taking possession of the inner man, revealing its holy earnestness, its patient grace, ah! at last we are ashamed. This is what we have esteemed so poorly, this is what we have wronged so deeply, against this our sin has acted in all its provocations. Then the eager demands of the impetuous heart, craving for its own treasures, shrink back rebuked and quelled; our complainings over those things that we judged to be too hard fall silent. Yes, we are ashamed. And in that silence, as the head sinks and the heart trembles in the presence of God, and we have nothing to answer for ourselves any more, do we not hear at last the Father's answer to our petulant unreason and unbelief, "Son, son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine"?

IX

THE CHILD ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY

"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." —LUKE xviii. 16.

THIS text is the memorable expression of the goodwill of Christ our Lord to the little ones; it tells us how He seeks them, and also how strictly He guards the place and privileges which He has conferred upon the children. Those, however, are not exactly the ideas on which, at present, I propose to dwell. I take these words, now, rather as teaching us something concerning the kingdom of God, concerning the spirit prevailing in it, the atmosphere pervading it, the kind of character which is congenial to it, or which it eminently welcomes and engenders. Christ's thoughts about the little ones, beautiful and gracious thoughts, do here come into our view:

but also His thoughts about His own kingdom and about the life which lies open to those who belong to it.

For we may easily have thoughts and impressions about the kingdom of God that are misleading. Some of us are apt to think, that with all its purity and all its grandeur, Christianity is somehow too severe and high. This hill of God is, indeed, sublime and glorious, and to reach its top is the one ambition which is altogether worthy: but the way is steep and the air is keen. To be indeed a Christian, to be thoroughly a Christian, seems to demand an effort and a surrender, not only serious, and not only great—but even such that in trying to comply, the balance and the equipoise of our nature are sacrificed. Does it not call us into relations, and propose to us ambitions, and lay on us obligations, that stretch a nature like ours too far, that kill its elasticity? Until one begins to say with Job, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?" Indeed, to salute these great elements, and then turn away, is easy as it is common: but to be sincere, thorough, to do justice to them, seems to suffuse life with solemnities that oppress it. It absorbs life on one side, so that all other sides of it fade and give way. Or if we still emphasise them, must we not

do it with a consciousness of being untrue to that which has proved its right to rule? Christianity and the claims of Christ, it may be said, import a state of things too strained; they call us to wind ourselves too high; they involve a concentration, a self-withdrawal, which make life onesided.

Christ is to be ever before us, is to have the first, the deepest place in our minds and hearts; and who more worthily could fill that place? For in Him we meet the true Goodness. But when we deal honestly and closely with it, does it not prove to be an awful goodness? We are to follow Christ —and whom more fitly than that proved and true Leader? And yet does He not lead into stern conflict, in which we die that we may truly live?

Such is the great object of faith, which sets the key of Christian life. And here emerges on us a view of sin that, once received, can never cease to colour all our views of human life. To be set on separation from sin is something great, absorbing, solemnising. And the career in which that salvation is realised, and comes into possession, involves a high intention and resolve, for it involves self-denial and cross-bearing.

It may be said that Christianity discloses to us a great love, the love of Christ—and that is true; greater hath no man. But is it not a love even

unmanageably great? Does it not bow the soul into the dust? Does it not burden life with a weight of obligation with which no man can adequately deal?

Every way, it may appear to some, this Christianity, if it is to be honest and earnest, imports a grave intensity which sets every faculty on the strain. We find ourselves in contact with elements that overmatch us. Under these influences life must turn away from all that gives it buoyancy, to keep step with the infinite and the eternal; it must, unless it will resign itself to be untrue to its own faith and to pay a wavering and uncertain tribute to that which has revealed itself as highest and most binding.

How plainly Christ Himself has put to us the relentless tests to which we must bow. "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." "Unless a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." Nothing is gained,—indeed everything would be lost,—if we should conceal from ourselves these searching truths. And though Christianity reveals a power which enables men to reckon with them hopefully, yet even in doing so, does it not commit us to a grave, burdened, anxious career, to a calling too high for us?

But now, see how plain it is that if we are led into the right way of dealing with it, this narrow path proves to be consistent with what is most fresh, and in the deepest sense most natural.

For consider it, that Christ welcomes the children. Speaking from the point of view of the Kingdom of Heaven, He owns them as being, characteristically, eminently fit subjects for its experience and its blessedness; people must be "such" if they are to have part there. "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Well, what are little children? Some of us have come a good way from the country where the little children dwell; but, by remembrance or by observation, we still know something about it.

Little children have a life which is very elastic, and to themselves most interesting. It is spontaneous, mobile, responsive. Theirs is an enjoying, experiencing nature, which lives vividly, and turns from one experience to another, sensitive to all. Their interest in things is eager, and their capacity for delight is great; so also is their capacity for grief, which their elders do not always realise; but in its keener experience their grief does not last long. Children can have wonderful dreams of imagined future achievement or attainment. But practically they do not look far ahead; they take

short views. To steady their whole faculties on some one conscious end for long periods together, is beyond them. True, they are capable of real and abiding character, and their minds may receive durable impressions which abide with them *as* impressions. But they do not settle into fixed postures, and a child certainly cannot get outside of his world. He must, in a sense, surrender himself to life and its experiences; although in his way of looking at life, and of meeting it, there is something—often a very remarkable something—that is his own. Still elastic, responsive, variable a child is. Well, is this sort of thing incongruous to Christianity—does it fail to fit into the Kingdom of Heaven? Not at all. "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

I have said that children are capable of character—every one of them has it and reveals it. Also they are capable of lively and powerful impressions, which may be abiding. But a little child cannot and does not make plans for the conduct of his life, neither does he analyse his own principles and motives, neither does he feel himself charged to any remote issues with his own welfare. Little children toil not, neither do they spin; they neither have storehouse nor barn; they do not charge themselves with insurance

against enemies or dangers. They take a great deal for granted, that it will be looked after, without their looking after it—that is a child's wisdom. They do not think much of to-morrow; and as regards to-day, they care, and care quite frankly and sincerely, about a great many little things, which cannot be said to have intrinsic worth, but are only their way of experiencing life. Are they hereby estranged from that great Saviour who came into the world charged with interests so supreme and so absorbing? Not at all. "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Well, but where there are children, the child-like side of things must exist and be developed. If the Kingdom of Heaven opens especially to the little children, then the life of the Kingdom of Heaven must be sympathetic in this direction. If in the upper Jerusalem there are children playing in the streets, then the buoyancy, the unconventional directness, the free gladness of child life must be in place there. The kingdom of God can be, when most fully revealed it eminently is, childlike. It is suitable to children.

Through the various natural life which children live vividly, they can, as I have said, be made participant of impressions, in which realities of great moment come home to them. All the more

is this so, because there is a freshness of perception in the child's mind on which things strike vividly; and there can be a wisdom in their hearts to see things as they are. Indeed, there is a wisdom in a child's heart not often possessed by maturer years. Children are conscious of the atmosphere in which they live; impressions of goodness, of truth, of love, if such elements surround them, are silently wrought into their memory and colour their own character. So, without ceasing to be children, they easily and rapidly become aware of an order of things about them, and a disposition of personal feeling in those about them on which they are to rely. For food, for protection, for comfort, they trust. It is a life of frank and confident dependence. Now amid the impressions which sustain this confidence it is abundantly possible for an impression to come, and grow and gain ground, of an Unseen friend, the story of whose life and death carries the assurance of a kindness, a helpfulness that cannot fail. That impression, when it comes, does no wrong to childhood, but rather comes in as the secret of the true and complete childhood. How gladly would the Saviour awaken it in the young heart! "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

And in like manner those impressions become for childhood the foundation of expectancy. The child looking forward, or dreaming of years to come, counts on the continuance of the same atmosphere of care, of provision, of security, free from change. It is a strange, sudden pang if the child reaches the point at which it can imagine as real the actual death of its protectors, and the vanishing of this care out of its life. The child lives in hope. Such hopes cannot always, can never completely be fulfilled. But a child's impression of the love and care of Christ may ground for it a hope that goes right out indefinitely —that is not bounded by the horizon of this world, but opens the portals and gladdens the prospect of a world to come.

And an element in the child's life is the happiness of living, of receiving love and returning it. This needs no enlarging. It is no incongruous thing, if into the heart of this experience of love there comes the impression of a love that is the source of all other good, a love that averts the saddest evils, a love that deserves the best return.

Once more a child awakens to the sense of authority, which it may contest and yet may feel to be just: it learns the peculiar experience of

obedience; it acquires a sense of the delight of aiding the great life around by little ministries of its own. And into the heart of this may come the recognition of a gentle and perfect King—whose voice speaks within as well as without—who reigns in righteousness and in peace.

It is not perhaps very necessary to say all this. We all admit that Christ has His way of dealing with and drawing the little children. But if He will have them, He must have them *as* children with the known qualities of children, of child life. Is this for Him a difficulty—an objection? Not at all. "Suffer them to come." Nay, so far from being an objection or a difficulty, they are eminently the type of those whom the kingdom should have for its own. Of such is the kingdom.

This is very good news for the children. But it tells something about the kingdom, which may be good news for others.

Out of it there seems to come for us, who are no longer children, and it may be a specially pertinent message for some of us, a gleam of encouragement and assurance. If the Kingdom of Heaven claims us, then even for us older people the child state is not lost. Neither is it our destiny to be *so* related to the infinite attributes of God, the high standard of His holiness and truth, that our

nature shall be wrenched and made non-natural, in the effort to hold proportion to that which is too high for us.

The poets indeed have said that the beauty and glory of childhood are left behind, so that only faint reminiscences are possible for us now. The vision has faded into the light of common day. It is only in "seasons of calm weather," since

> "Inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
> Which brought us hither,
> Can in a moment travel thither,
> And see the children sport upon the shore,
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

Only in some happy hour can we once more recover the point of view

> "From which the enlightened spirit sees
> The shady city of palm trees."

Shall the kingdom of God avail to restore to us that blessedness? Indeed, it is not possible, it would not be desirable to reach a promised land in this direction, by a process of retrogression, by resuming the conditions of immaturity; still less through the mere operation of decay, with its feebleness and its blunted sensibility. Far otherwise: we are to set our faces forward, leaving that which is

behind. But in this Christian calling of ours—with its burdens and its efforts—with its humiliations and its yearnings—there lies the promise (and there is found the *earnest*) of a nobler childhood; childhood with its vivid natural experiences, its various and frank enjoyment, its peaceful trust, its consciousness of a greatness all around that does not fret nor fever, but that guards and rests, its fresh perception of the wonder and mystery of being, its pleasant ministries, and its contentedness to be a child.

Progress has its experience of disturbance and rearrangement, and sin has brought its bitterness and its conflict—penitence and renunciation—death and life. But Christ who knows us well, has a rest for us which we have barely caught glimpses of as yet.

For, if you will think of it, what mainly makes the grace of childhood? Is it not this, that the child being set in a world of persons and forces, far stronger than itself,—beyond its grasp and reach,—to which notwithstanding in the very roots of its being it is related,—this being so, all is happily adjusted by the presence of great and strong affections, which bring everything into sympathy and rest, into happy and hopeful life. But, is not that just *Christianity*?—*we* find ourselves in a world

how great, high, far reaching—in which wonderful affections on God's side and, through His grace, on ours come in to bless us? It is so; but how truly we hardly guess. In this direction Christianity has secrets we have but partially found out as yet. Let this be believed. Some know much, perhaps, of the dust and toil of conflict; of the weariness of the way, in the great enterprise of walking with God; of the pain of loss; but when we are fighting and burdened, what is it about after all? Is it not about realising Christ in His grace and help; is it not about retaining faith and hope and love? But in holding on to these it is the child nature and the child destiny we are holding on to—not that which has passed away, but that which is coming; that happiness and freedom the secret and security of which are God Himself.

In our walking with God, or seeking to do it, in trying to affirm in our own lives the distinction between good and evil, some of us have felt as if the great Nature we venerate and worship, without whom we could not consent to be, does yet, when He comes near to us and we to Him, so overwhelm us with a sense of disproportion and contrast, that an experience of trouble and disgrace for us seems to associate itself almost necessarily with that Presence. And this may be

a needful and a wholesome experience; but it is not final. The infinite greatness and goodness is to be the very rest of God's children. On the earth a great man—great in mind and heart—and a little child go well together. I have seen a picture of such a man whom once I knew—now long gone—and a little child; and the thought that came to every one who saw it was the thought of the happy friendship for both, which the picture suggested and revealed. It shall be so, in that world, where God and God's works and ways shall still exceed all our thoughts. His greatness shall not make thee afraid: strong affections, His and ours, shall adjust it all. Even remembered sin shall be adjusted in the thankful consciousness of grace. And the various experiences of these unimagined worlds in all their wealth, shall never be out of harmony with the rest and gladness of a child's heart.

One has known Christians, old Christians, in regard to whom it is not difficult to think that they have passed into that better childhood in the world where they are gone. One can imagine, so far, how they have risen into eternal Youth. Frank recognition of the wonder and the greatness of the world around them, frank and adoring consciousness of God's unsearchable goodness

and glory, with the simplest confidence in His love, affectionate compliance with His will, and a great brightness and gladness of spirit—these were so far evident in them here, that it is not hard to imagine a great expansion of it there. But how beautifully and simply it is so; what a starry light is on their foreheads now, we cannot represent to ourselves. Eye hath not seen it. It hath not entered into the heart of man.

But did not our blessed Lord Himself in His human nature, with all His steadfast manhood of service and conflict and endurance in life and death—did not He on earth rejoice to be as a little child in His Father's hands? Does He not know the simplicity of trust, the lowly looking up from the station assigned to Him, the frank experience of a simple and loyal nature that accepts its world and takes its place? Does He not know the experience in which all disparities are adjusted by the right and the power of great affections? He could place Himself alongside the little children in the days of His flesh, and He can do it in eternity. "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

I have been speaking of the future where the perfect fulfilment of all this shall arise. But the theme bears also on the present. The Spirit of

adoption is Christ's great gift in order that we may begin to find out how true and how good all this is, as we say, Abba Father. And we need this. Some of us have not realised how much we need it, and how much it concerns us to have it. There is indeed a manhood which it becomes a Christian to assume. In understanding be men. But with many, even if Christianity be with them more than a mere name, it lacks too much the childlike grace, the sweetness and the peace of access to God as children. With soldier-like fidelity and endurance, with servant-like assiduity and industry it would agree well that there should be the tranquillity, the gladness, and the rest of a child's heart. "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; so he giveth his beloved sleep." It is possible for you to take charge of your own affairs, to deal with your own burdens, to wrestle with your own temptations, in a way that conceals from you a Presence it would be good for you to see, and withdraws you from an attitude and a frame of spirit it would be good for you to experience. It would be good for some of you to be more in the way of coming to sit down at the feet of God in Christ, and to think that a child is glad to have a Father; also, that the Father is glad to have a child.

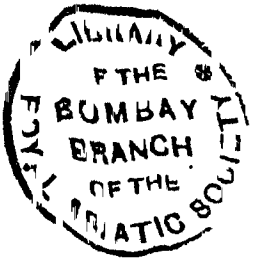
Looking backward, we see our childhood dimly, distant. It had its share of the good belonging to that state. But it was not ideal—far from it. It, too, was subject to that strange impoverishment which mars this present world. It had its troubles and sorrows and, alas, its stains. But we also look forward. And what those look forward to who do not follow Christ I do not know, I will not try to imagine. But Christians are looking forward to the true childhood, the ideal one; all experiences, attainments, insights, harmonised into a new state, in which the wisest and the best of us shall be as children under God's loving eye, and in God's great and various world.

Some of us are old—old enough, and not very wise, alas, and far, as we know too well, from being very strong—and, alas, yet more, perhaps, with little of the childlike about us. We are hackneyed—conventionalised. The child is inwardly strong to dream of guarding his own world; he thinks he can work out his own ideals: but we have passed through youth and manhood. We have made our compromises, we have transacted with the world, and with our own conscience, life has hardened and impoverished us—we are worn, we are wearied. The grace of childhood, if ever we had any of it, has been marred in our hands,

and passed from us. We can understand what a poet meant when, recalling his childhood's impressions that the tall trees touched the sky, he went on—

> "It was a childish ignorance,
> But now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm farther off from heaven
> Than when I was a boy."

Ah, but my brethren, there is hope for us yet. Christ is come to make us young again—to make a beginning of it, that shall have its outcome in a better country, where the people are forgiven their iniquities. The world cannot do it for us—not by wealth, or fame, or lust—and we cannot do it for ourselves, but Christ can do it for us. That is His business. Old as we are and worn, we may still find part in the grace of One Whom we hear saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."



X

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

JOHN iv. 1-20.

PART I

OUR Lord's ministry in Jerusalem was awakening an angry interest in the minds of the Pharisees, and He judged it fitting, for the present, to go elsewhere. So He departed again into Galilee; and He must needs go through Samaria. Jerusalem frowned upon Him; He was on His way to "His own country," to Galilee, where the prophet "had no honour"; and He passes through Samaria, the region that lay between—the region in which Jew and Samaritan "have no dealings" with one another. That was the kind of world into which our Lord had come. So far He had gone on His journey, and had reached "Jacob's Well"—a place of old traditional interest. It was

now the sixth hour, high noon; the day was growing hot. Jesus, weary with His journey, sat "thus," —as a weary man might do—on the well—we may suppose on the low erection that guarded it. His disciples had gone, meanwhile, into the town not very far away, to buy some food. Then there arrived at the well a Samaritan woman, who came to draw water. It has been made a question, why, if she dwelt in the city, she should go to that particular well to draw water. It is an idle question. We do not know that she dwelt exactly in the city; nor do we know what reasons she might have for avoiding one well and frequenting another. Wells are places where people go to draw water; and it suited her, on some account or other, to go to this one.

Now of this woman of Samaria we learn something as the story goes on; and we gather that she was not a good woman, and certainly she could not be a very happy one. She was not a good woman, for her life, in important features of it, had been reckless and immoral. And she could not be very happy, for her past had not been a success; and as to the future—what was there to look for? Her youth, or much of it, was gone; life had left its mark upon her; she was already discovering, most likely, as so many have done,

that the people who help us to go wrong are aiming at their own satisfaction much more than at ours. Very likely at the outset of her life she started with lively expectations—with a disposition to ask much of life and to make the most of it. If so, she had passed through many a disappointment; now, life offered her fewer resources, and the earlier courage and buoyancy could hardly be maintained at the old pitch.

However, it does not follow that we are to think of her as in any very tragical state of mind. There is no appearance of it; and, I may add, no likelihood. Life was getting narrower and poorer; but people whose lives are spoilt acquire the art of not thinking too much about it. They live for the hour. As long as they are not forced to do otherwise, they let trifles of the day fill their thoughts: and when trouble can no longer be avoided they harden their hearts and defy it. People who have been fatally foolish, people who have done wrong, have many different ways of making the best of it. Your day has become gloomy, your weather has become bleak, the clouds are becoming ominous; but still you can refuse to think about it, and you can whistle to keep your courage up. Most likely this woman went out to draw water in a perfectly ordinary,

everyday mood of mind. If in her youth she had seemed to herself to descry an inheritance before her in some promised land of hope, that hope had failed: but she could fight her battle as yet, at all events.

So she came to the well to draw. And she found there a tired Jewish stranger sitting. Naturally His morning's journey had left Him thirsty. So He asks her for a drink of water. And her reply is, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a Samaritan?"

Something might here be said on this point, that Christ can begin His special intercourse with souls, not, as it were, by offering anything, but rather by asking for something—asking, shall we say? for some small favour. But we leave that to your own meditations and pass on.

You see there is nothing in the woman's reply but a rather light-hearted way of entering into conversation—tossing the ball back to the unknown speaker—joined to some satisfaction, that the circumstances enabled her to be saucy to a Jew. "What! a Jew condescend to be beholden for a drink to a Samaritan!—and does he really expect to get it? Who could have believed it?"

But forthwith the conversation rises into higher regions. Jesus answered and said unto her, "If

thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Observe here that whatever religious suggestion or association the term "living water" carries to our ear, as readers of the Bible, the phrase did not necessarily mean to the woman's ear more than "good spring water"—as we might say, "water from the living spring."

But here we must for a little leave the woman and think of the meaning of Jesus in these words of His. For though our Lord was on the way to an understanding, and indeed as I believe an agreement, with the woman, He and she are far enough apart as yet. And what He meant is one thing; what as yet she understood of His meaning is another. We listen to our Lord speaking to this sister of ours, "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

The gift of God is eternal life, as we may see in Rom. vi. 23; and that this view of it is in our Lord's mind at this time, is plain from *v.* 14. It is eternal life—a great thought which has a large place in this gospel, and throughout the

New Testament. But when we have said this, are we any farther on? Do we understand our Lord any better? This word, eternal life, is one of those to which we become accustomed; and our minds slide over it with little light and faint impression. What is eternal life? Who can utter it? But it is something, of which if we could know that by painful search a man might find it—that some time, somewhere, far east under the eyelids of the morning, or far west where the sun goes down, it might possibly be had—then for such a treasure well might a man leave all else and give his whole existence to this one quest. For this is existence becoming for ever blessed and worthy, this is existence becoming durably and without all end a success, a triumph—this is to be rich indeed—to have eternal life.

Eternal life is first the everlasting goodness which rests on agreement, complete and final, with God:—and then it is the everlasting gladness which is the proper grace and crown of God's children. The secret of it is that God's love is in it—Love delighting to do its own good will. Therefore it turns existence into one great song of gladness and of praise that ever we were created. This is the true, the undeniable, the

victorious good. It is not deserved; it is not earned; it is not bought with a price; it cannot be ours on those terms. But it is given. "If thou knewest the gift of God."

Yet this wonderful possibility might float before our minds as a dream, too magnificent to be dealt with as a reality, too transcendent. At the hearing of it aspirations might awaken within us, longings might stir; but how soon must they be discouraged and beaten down by experience, by the ever-returning experience of life's poverty and weakness and inconsistency? But it is another matter if One has come to the earth who has eternal life, and whose mission is to give it; One who has come among us from the Father, as the expression of the Father's love; One who has come in order that the gift might reach us actually, fittingly, righteously; One who has descended into the fellowship of our sorrow and weakness that we might come into the fellowship of His own wealth and victory; One who has right and power and will to make the gift ours. If thou knewest, O woman, if thou knewest, WHO it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink!

"And He would give thee living water." The living water is the same and not the same as the great gift of eternal life. It is the same, because

it is the beginning, the earnest, the vital force from which the great result proceeds; it is the fountain, the well of water springing up unto everlasting life. It is not the same, in so far as the word "eternal life" rather intimates to our minds the secure and final possession; but the "living water" rather suggests the experience through which the eternal life becomes to us something real, and dear, and hopeful—becomes to us more and more evidently ours. The living water is the Holy Spirit who opens to us the mind and heart of God in Christ, and persuades and enables us to know and love, to serve and enjoy Him. "This spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive." The two are one; yet two, in respect that grace entering to overcome the darkness and the hardness and the meanness and the poverty of sin, is one thing; and glory, with its victory and its peace, is another.

And this is God's gift. Jesus had asked a gift; she, in earnest or in sport, set herself to debate it. But there is one great Giver—the author of many gifts alike to Samaritan and to Jew. This earthly water was itself His gift, one which nature itself teaches us men should share with one another. But has God no other and no better gifts? Is there no gift which is peculiarly

worthy of Himself, in which Himself is revealed and comes to us, in receiving which we find God Himself? Yes indeed there is; through Christ this comes to us. This is the glory and wonder of the Gospel—glad tidings of great joy.

And it comes in this way; men, awakening to its reality and conscious of their need of it, ask for it; and it is given to them for the asking. The greatest gift conceivable comes to us so. O sinner, O penitent, O saint, if thou knewest, thou wouldst ask, and He would give thee the living water. He would indeed.

The seriousness of our Lord's tone, and the sudden entrance into the colloquy of the great name of God, are the elements which must have made the woman feel that some great matters are in hand—things such that she knows not what to make of them—nor whether to take them as seriously as they are proposed. Something is in His mind and in His speech which has been far from her thoughts, and yet it seems to claim her; but what is it? It falls on the ear of her soul like the far-off sound of great waters heard by night in a desert land. Do you not think you see her stand, she who had come with her sleeping conscience, pleased with the accidental superiority that enabled her to tease a thirsty Jewish wanderer

—do you not think you see her, as the name of God and the gift of God and her own interest in both come to the front, and as the stranger claims ability to do some great thing for her?

She does not fathom His meaning; yet she dimly feels that she is thrown back on principles, if she can find any to fall back upon. The woman saith (*v.* 11); "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?" The mingling of various shades of feeling is very apparent here. First the "Sir" is significant; a certain respect has been imposed upon her by the demeanour of Him who speaks, and by His evident allusion to something which He reckons very important. But then there is doubt as to what He means; what *can* He mean? Does He mean simply water; and if so is it water of this well, or of some better well; and if He means something more or higher than water, what is it? And then who is He that makes Himself so great, and claims to be able to bestow a gift of water that is so much to be prized? Is He serious? What does He mean by it? Then she suspects that there is some

Jewish meaning in it, intended to humble the Samaritan, which requires a certain protest, and an attitude of defence. Lastly, there is the feeling that in order to get at His meaning it may be wisest to assume that He means what is most obvious. That will force Him to explain Himself. "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; and if you profess to be so well off, and so able to enrich others with water, whence have you that water of a living spring? And as to divine gifts, as to desirable water-springs, are you greater than our father Jacob which gave us the well? What is all this that seems to be so earnestly spoken, as by one who has much to give? Are we, am I so poor? Perhaps you count me so because I am a Samaritan; as if we did not hold our place and our inheritance here as Jacob's and Joseph's children?" She is interested, she is puzzled, she is suspicious, yet curious and expectant; but one sees no token of an awakening sense of sin, or of need by reason of sin. Something about this stranger and His speech has disposed her to a reverent feeling, and has roused her to inquiry, but that, as yet, is all we can say.

Jesus answered and said unto her, "Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but who-

soever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life." The answer was fitted to increase the interest and curiosity of the woman. Moreover, the contrast between the two kinds of water is so expressed that she could hardly fail to realise that something solemn and weighty was intended. It was so expressed also as to appeal very forcibly to human experience of the anxieties and disappointments of life. What worldling is there, if he will but ever so little reflect, who shall not feel the pathos of the words "Thirst again," and the magnificence of the promise, "Never thirst"? Lastly, the spirituality of our Lord's meaning, that it had to do with the welfare of the soul, must have become apparent to His hearer in the closing words, "Springing up into eternal life." She probably guessed this already, but she must have perceived it now. Still, even so, the meaning might be very superficially apprehended —and the whole promise might be regarded with great incredulity.

But let us dwell a little on these words of Christ, and consider what they meant as spoken by Him.

This is what He chooses for the point of

comparison, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Water is God's good gift which serves in its own place to meet the necessities of living beings. But, as it cannot suffice for *all* the thirst of man, so it cannot durably suffice for that literal thirst which craves for water. To have received once, to have received often so much water as quenches present thirst, gives no security against thirsting by and by. That will not secure you against being in a few hours as thirsty, as much in need of deliverance from thirst, as you were before. The virtue is exhausted, and you are where you were. Nor does your drinking once put you in possession of any permanent means of quenching recurrent thirst. You may be cast off from the sources of supply; then you will perish as certainly as though you had never drunk at all.

"This water," then, may stand as the representative of all earthly enjoyments and resources. These are essentially God's gifts; man uses or abuses them. He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again. It is true of the pleasures of sin, it is true also of enjoyments and satisfactions not essentially, not in themselves sinful, but which we reckon as our treasures. Enjoyment does not secure you in a continuity of enjoyment; it may

exhaust your resources but cannot perpetuate them. All this does not open to you a vista of endless goodness and gladness. It fades with a world which vanishes away. For even if the material resource continues to be available, the satisfaction we get from it fails—it goes done—or we go done, and vanish away. Trust in this and you shall be again athirst, as sore athirst, more hopelessly athirst than ever. Hear it, men of business and men of pleasure. Hear it, you that find your well-springs in money, in gaiety, in youth, in vice—nay, in such worthy regions as literature and art, in such as honour and affection. He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.

"But he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst." How much is here! Here is something given by Christ the Son of God who made us and knows our wants, the Son of man who came to share them. He is not mocking us when He speaks so, any more than He was mocking this poor woman who was His hearer at the moment. Such water He gives. And what does this "water" mean; what sort of water is it? Read the life of Christ. Ask what manner of spiritual fountains sprung up, and quickened and made beautiful and rich that life of His. That is the kind of water. Only as it comes to us it

comes forgiving, healing, reconciling, life-giving, strengthening, comforting. And he that drinketh of this water which Christ gives, shall never thirst.

True, he who receives through Christ this earnest of the life eternal shall often feel the deep need of heavenly influence, and to the end he shall desire the increase of it. But yet he is partaker of a fountain whose waters are in themselves satisfying; and he is placed in an inward relation to it, in virtue of which his access to it is open, and the more his experience of it grows the fuller is the satisfying influence which it yields. He knows where his well-springs are, and how divine they are. "He shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, neither shall cease from yielding fruit." The presence and influence of the Spirit of Christ has an upspringing nature. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Does this mean that a man becomes independent, "increased with goods, and having need of nothing"? Does it mean that he begins to carry about with him a fulness of resource in virtue of which he may hold himself complete, able to supply out of a fountain of his own

the cravings of an immortal nature? Surely not. For indeed now he has met with God; he has found Him; and in becoming completely poor, he has opened to him the "all things" which are in the fulness of God. But the living water is the more surely his because it is from the Lord. And it springs up into life everlasting. It looks to nothing less than that great consummation, and it does not fall short of that great hope.

Note now how our Lord puts it, "He who drinketh of the water that I shall give him." There is on our part a claiming and a receiving. We thirst, we ask, we drink, embracing and laying hold of this eternal life. In this process that life seeks continually its own growth and increase, the water springing up into life everlasting.

How absolutely our blessed Lord puts all this to the poor, ignorant, sin-stained woman who stood before Him. If thou knewest thou wouldst ask, and if thou didst ask He would give thee the living water. Conceive the situation; this poor sister of ours meeting the Son of God, who assures her and would persuade her, that He has eternal life for all who ask.

When these words were spoken, how much of the meaning gained entrance into this woman's mind? Little, probably; and yet more, perhaps,

than she could herself have explained. In what she says we see rather the surface of her mind than the depth of it. She could not but be interested, touched, impressed; aware also by this time that the welfare of her soul was somehow the business in question. We see no evidence so far that she has felt her real need, much less that she has owned the right and power of Christ to deliver her. But the words of this strange and grave speaker might well awaken some sense of want, some wistful longing after she knew not well what.

But as yet it was all only words—words beautiful, suggestive, attractive, "a lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice," yet words only. And one does not commit oneself, even if one is moved, to him who can only speak words. Therefore whether she is moved at all, and whether more moved or less, her next saying is natural enough, for one who is still on the defensive, who has by no means as yet surrendered. If there is water that is so precious, that can do such wonderful things for us, water that so transcends all that we have known, and if you can give it, well do it, please to do it, and then there will be no doubt about it. "Sir, give me this water that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw." Still the "Sir"

of respect; still the doubt how far the stranger may deserve attention; still the incredulous half-sarcastic tone you adopt towards one who seems to boast himself to be greater than he is likely to turn out to be; still a touch of the defensive levity which might cloak, perhaps, a good deal of curiosity; and with all that, some desire to find out whether there might not be something in it worth seeking and worth having. A kind of hope and a kind of fear might be present; the very state of mind which has often been realised when interest has been awakened and conviction not yet reached.

So the conversation came to its crisis, which must be dealt with in another discourse.

Meanwhile let these thoughts go with us:—

1. Eternal life is a gift. It always is a gift, it never reached any man otherwise. It is God's gift, His, and it is like Him to give it. And when it is given, God Himself is in the gift. Do we know this gift of God? Has the nature of it, the worth of it, the intense reality of it, the love and tenderness that are in it, have these revealed themselves at all, taken place in our thoughts, interested us, drawn us, stirred our hearts?

2. Do we know WHO has come among us from the Father? For face to face with the thought of eternal life we might despair—it is too great, it

seems too far away. But do we know WHO this is that has come among us, seeking us, whose voice reaches us, whose incarnation and death signify that He is Himself athirst for our salvation, and that He has come to undertake it? Do we know? Has He taken His place in *our* world?

3. If you knew you would ask; daily, humbly, with wonder and shame and gratitude, you would ask. Are we asking? You would ask, and He would give you, most certainly He would give you the living water.

XI

THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

JOHN iv. 1-20.

PART II

THE woman had asked our Lord to give her that living water, little knowing what she asked, and meaning, probably, to put it to the test whether He had any gift to bestow. And yet there might be on her part a certain expectancy, a desire to see what was to come out of this strange interview. Our Lord meets her with a counter-request, certainly unexpected, and yet more in the line of an understanding between them than she was aware of. On the face of it, it was a perfectly becoming request. If there were to be dealings, important and confidential dealings, between her and a man she had never seen before, it was proper that her husband, if she had one,

should be aware of it. But it came really as a sudden thrust; it found her unprovided, so that all she could say was "I have no husband." Like her other answers this is still precautionary; she was not going to commit herself if she could help it. And possibly the thought crossed her mind that for all Jesus knew she might be a widow. Yet very likely there must have been conscious embarrassment in the reply, enough to make herself feel that the embarrassment might be visible.

But not as one guessing at the cause of an embarrassment that betrayed itself, rather, as one looking into her heart and all along her life, our Lord brings up what she had wished to conceal. "Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. In that saidst thou truly." In saying this the Lord makes two distinct impressions on her mind. She becomes conscious that her history is known to Him; and she becomes conscious, so far, of the way in which that history, in its moral aspect, must be regarded by this remarkable stranger.

For observe, if she was to be made to know what the meaning of this living water was, the only way to teach her was to bring home to her the conviction of her sin. Only in this way could

it be really *understood.* No doubt by taking another method something could be done. By indoctrinating her in various prophetic statements, and setting these in a clearer light by His own word she might, without any conviction of sin, be brought—how far? As far as many an unbelieving Jew.

But if she was to understand what the gift is and who the giver of it, she must be made to feel her sin. Not merely to own sin in general, as it may attach to any of us; not merely to recognise that she was herself a sinner in some great instances, which she knew perfectly well; but to feel the shame and evil of that with which she was so familiar, that which she had persuaded herself to think of as no way so ugly or so evil. This was needed. Until she should feelingly discern, of what her heart was capable, of evil and good, the nature and the worth of the living water could not open to her. But then, some apprehension of a great need of hers and of a great boon of God's might come home.

I have said this was needed that she might *understand;* it was needed also in order that she might *receive* the gift. Thus Christ would impart it. For how can a spirit be made partaker of spiritual good, to be received as befits a spirit, in

knowledge and in love, unless it is awakened from its dream of lies, and made conscious in some degree of the spiritual world in which we stand?

Hence when men are coming towards reconciliation with God, a fresh and vivid sense of sin is often a conspicuous feature of their experience; and even in cases where that is not so conspicuous, the realities of the situation do substantially make themselves felt by the repenting man.

But, after all, it may be said, Was there here anything so very much fitted to produce conviction? Did she not very well know all along that she had had five husbands—implying probably several divorces—and that he whom she now had was not her husband? There was nothing in that to startle or impress her. And, of course, I admit that so much might be said without effect, or might even harden and irritate her, in place of making any good impression. Yet when, taken unprepared, we find that some one whom we supposed to be an entire stranger is looking on our sin, and when conscience has a sudden fresh grasp laid on it as the result, it is remarkable how the wounds that seemed to be skinned over open again, and how the real moral situation flashes into consciousness in a new light.

Christ's words made her feel that her life, with

its sad failures, was called into view and lay before His eye. Now mark the next step. It may be there was a pause of silence. Then came the acknowledgment, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

She came to that conclusion because He manifested a knowledge of her life such as she was sure He could not have by ordinary means. As to this, not only was Jesus a stranger whom she had never met before, but it is quite possible that some part or element of her history embraced in Christ's saying, might have remained unknown to the people of that neighbourhood, might in her own belief have been successfully concealed from all the world. Any way, she felt irresistibly that one endowed with superhuman knowledge was talking with her—one whose knowledge came not in the ordinary way, but from above. A quite new impression might come home to her of a divine inspection of her life—God seeing, knowing, having a mind about her state and conduct. For in the manner of our Lord's last sentence, in what He said and left unsaid, she could not but feel that it was the moral value of these facts that interested Him, and which He desired should interest her.

This, too, would finally give her the key to the

significance of the whole conversation, if that was still doubtful to her. The direction, at least, in which the meaning of the "living water" lay became clear. It was prophet's work that had been adoing throughout the conversation; the authority and earnestness of a prophet, an interpreter of the divine mind, had confronted her; blessings which a prophet might commend had been offered to her. Through this man she was dealing with God. This had come home to her at last convincingly, in that sudden testimony that the stranger looked prophetically on her career. So then, God's eye had all along been upon that careless and wanton life—and now He has met her by His messenger: "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

It is not necessary to lay down anything as to the degree of conviction, or the measure of solemnity with which this came home. It might be more and it might be less. But that a definite crisis had come is apparent in this, that these words of hers are, so to say, words of *surrender*. Frank as she was and ready to converse, she has yet been all along on the defensive; all her sentences have been precautionary; at no point has she admitted any particular view of her own position; of the design

of the stranger, of the worth of His words. Now she at once concedes Him a position which leaves no room for further fence. Even though staggered, though greatly impressed, she might have persisted in her former tactics, might have finessed, have temporised. But she has come to the point of giving in. God has confronted her. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

And now if this is a prophet, what next? He has been speaking to her of living water which He can give. He has awakened her to some impression of her state as it appears to the divine eye. He has assured her that the water which He can give is such as will leave her athirst no more. But how new it all is, and much of it how vague as yet! One thing seems to her less vague. If God be in it—if a prophet of God be in it, it must all be somehow connected with religion. It is in the way of religiousness, if at all, that she must take relation to these things. And she is right there, if she knows what religion itself really means. But her thoughts about that run in grooves of customary impression out of which it is hard to get. If she is to do something religiously, one question seems to rise up at once. The prophet is a Jew; will He ask her to pass over to Judaism? Is the religion of the

hostile and scornful Jews to prove to her the fountain of living water? Is she to forsake everything with which heretofore she has associated any remnants of religion that she had? A prophet's call is strong; but does He call her to this? She brings up the difficulty. For from her point of view it is real and practical. If she is to do anything, if she is to reach out to the good things a prophet can impart, if in a word there is to be any drawing near to God whom she feels now to be a living God—at least, to have a living messenger—she must, apparently, solve this doubt. Heretofore, if at any time religious anxiety stirred within her, she could ascend Mount Gerizim and join in Samaritan worship. But now she feels on the point of being all abroad; and she spreads out her perplexity. "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain: and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Even so at this day there are awakening souls that say, "Yes, we need to be other than we have been—we ought to have religion for one thing—but which?"

This, I think, is the working of her thought and the meaning of her words. Some have held that her saying is an evasion; she is trying to escape from the contemplation of her sins to

which the Lord's words point her, and to get the conversation away to debates about ritual and about churches. But I cannot think so,—both because of the frank surrender in the opening words, "I perceive that thou art a prophet," and also because hers seems to me to be a quite natural movement of thought at her stage of progress, and in her circumstances. I grant, that the utterance shows how her mind is entangled in the outward and the formal. How entangled often are men on whom the light is just breaking, and with what difficulty are they released from those entanglements!

Coarse and dim as her religious conceptions may be, the Lord at all events does not despise her question; He does not turn from it as beside the point. He replies to her; and He does so in one of the most memorable of those impressive declarations which to the end of time shall guide the minds of men.

There is great earnestness in His manner. "Woman, believe me." It is a form of expression used by Him nowhere else. How earnestly He asks to be believed! It is as if He would win her away at once from the region of carnal contention, Samaritan or Jewish, to truth, the sense of which was very strong and fresh on His own

spirit at that time. With the most earnest friendliness He would guide her to ground where she shall stand clear of the perplexities that bewilder her; He would lead her straight to His Father. "Woman, believe me."

Why this earnestness? Because it was well-timed—the woman was willing to be persuaded, perceiving Him to be a prophet. Also because He was moved at the sight of her ignorance and difficulty, and was so able to point her to the right way; also because He yearned over the soul of this lost sheep, whom He had met on His journey. Finally, because in her He saw a specimen of mankind to whom He was sent. Mankind was to be blessed in Him; that time was coming. Driven as He was from Jerusalem and Judea, from those who were "His own," it was a sinful Samaritan woman whose conscience proved accessible, and whose mind turned to Him to remove her difficulties. How welcome to the heart of Christ would her bringing in be! "Woman, believe me."

First, He assures her that the time was passing away in which such questions as hers could have practical importance for seekers after God. "The hour cometh when neither in Jerusalem nor in this mountain shall ye worship the Father." Neither

in the one place nor in the other; no such determined place, no such localised and detailed ceremonial should be observed. And He names the Father, the true object of worship, both in opposition to those "fathers" on whom she was so prone to rely, and also to bring out to her mind that great object of adoration of whom her views were so imperfect.

Then, as to the questions between the Samaritan and the Jew, He lets her know distinctly that in the main the Jews were right. The Jews had the oracles of God. It was not in that mountain, but at Jerusalem that the appointed worship was carried on. But our Lord's way of declaring it was fitted to carry conviction to her mind in its actual state, and to turn her from those distracting enmities which had attended the controversy. "Ye worship ye know not what"; her own heart must have told her it was true. It was a vague, unrevealed God, a God who, as they worshipped Him, did not draw near, did not afford them living water. That appeared in her own form of words. This mountain, or Jerusalem —which was the place where men "*ought to worship*"? The worship was a process which men got through, and it terminated in itself; it did not bring them to God. Although the Samaritans held to

the Mosaic books, yet in the rejection of all that followed, they rejected the heart of the Mosaic teaching. As poor and as fruitless as theirs, the worship of a Jew *might* be; but it need not be so. "Salvation is of the Jews: we know what we worship." A God revealed in word and deed, in promise and fulfilment, is ours. The Lord, therefore, could not sanction the Samaritan worship. "Ye know not what ye worship."

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It is not meant that heretofore none had worshipped in spirit and truth; but it is meant that heretofore the fixed and outward place and mode had taken the lead in men's minds as a primary condition of acceptable worship. Jerusalem, or a worship that had respect to Jerusalem, counted for much. Now it was to be no longer so. The access to God was to be opened up. The true worship through the accepted sacrifice was to stand in its proper character, as worship in spirit and in truth.

So men should worship the Father. For, being a Father, He desires and seeks His children's hearts.

Nothing else beseems Him. He seeketh such to worship Him.

The foundation of all this is declared. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." God is a Spirit —is Spirit. He has no body, parts, nor passions; is tied to no place, no outward forms; is not especially accessible (as far as His own nature is concerned) by one outward ceremonial more than by another. He is Spirit; whatever we know of spiritual existence from our own experience of understanding, affection, conscience, will,—whatever we have heard or can conceive of yet higher spiritual creatures, all point upward to uncreated forms of spiritual excellence in Him who is uncreated Spirit. If, then, we are successfully to worship Him, it must be as spirits approaching Him who is a Spirit; so alone can He be dealt with. It must be with the mind contemplating, the affections moved legitimately, the will deciding and choosing. And that which we give or render to Him must be not mere outward service, but ourselves as spiritual beings, a living sacrifice.

His worship must emphatically be worship in spirit and therefore in truth, most sincere, not in shadow and type only, not in images and forms of truth, but in Truth itself.

Hitherto this had been, so far, under a veil, because the accepted worship had been tied to places and to forms. For while Christ was not yet come, and the way into the holiest not yet made manifest, the access was obscure. Only those who, seeking God with humble hearts, used the appointed forms, might find Him holding fellowship with them. But now the way to God should be more manifest.

Our Lord, in effect, puts to this woman the two great truths, so apt to be forgotten. First, that God's worship must be in its essence spiritual, a business of the mind and heart, in which the worshipper becomes himself the temple and the offering; therefore in its essence it is independent of places and times. Second, that an effectual introduction to God and to His worship, comes about in a certain way, by a real revelation given in place and time, for Salvation *is* of the Jews; only not so of the Jews as to tie true worshippers to the peculiarities of Jewish ritual, but so that the salvation held out to Israel must be accepted if the true worship is to be known.

For indeed the worship may be anywhere. But for us sinners to find a way to God and to fellowship with God, a mediator is needed, and "the living water." This is salvation; and Salvation is of the Jews.

Some have wondered and thought it strange that to one so ignorant and dark as this woman was, our Lord should propound a doctrine so sublime. Yet surely the wonder is itself strange. It is meant that the spirituality of the divine nature baffles the highest effort of our thought, and that real access to that spiritual God seems to us difficult if not incredible. What, then, could such a disciple as this make of it? But if this doctrine is sublime, all the more plainly is it one of those truths in regard to which all are on a level—those truths, which, if the conscience and the heart be right, may find their way into the least-educated mind and commend themselves, by an evidence of their own. That God the Spirit may be met with anywhere, may be worshipped anywhere, that the worship sanctifies the place, that His heart is ready to meet ours and His mind to hold fellowship with ours, these are truths that might go directly home, might be instantly felt to be true: and yet perhaps, again, they might be felt to be sadly true.

Sadly true, if the woman dimly felt the chains of darkness; if she knew not well how to deal with this sudden visitation of light; if she felt that she was no true worshipper and did not know how to become one, and was unready to close

with a spiritual and living God; if she felt that the worship which is in spirit and may be anywhere was very far above her. How far she might feel herself to be from the mind of those whom the Father seeketh to worship Him! And how hard it seemed to know what to trust to, and how her wilful, unaccustomed feet should find their way to any true good! And yet, a strong hand had been laid upon her; she was thrilling with new impressions. What was she to do?

The Samaritans, though they did not receive the later Scriptures, cherished the expectation of the coming of Messiah. They based this hope, it is said, on the text in which Moses speaks of a prophet to be raised up like to himself. To the woman, groping among such religious possibilities as her thoughts suggested, that expectation occurred. Was there any help in it? And perhaps—for who can certainly tell?—as she looked at this prophet whose message had broken so suddenly into her life—perhaps a wonderful conjecture dawned on her mind. Was it possible? Was it not too daring to be true? And yet, WHO was this? "I know that Messias cometh; when he is come, he will tell us all things." Was it not something more than a remark as to possible help? Was it not an appeal? It was answered.

"Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."

She could say nothing. After a little she turned and departed to the city; but she went full of a wonderful discovery. What follows shows it. This was the Messiah,—the Messiah Himself had been in earnest converse with HER. And the proof of it to be produced to other minds was this, "He told me all things that ever I did." The story leaves her as one that confessed Christ before men, and heard her townsmen testifying, on the strength of their own conviction, that her witness was true. We hear of her no more.

But is not so much enough? What a conception of Christ, what a window into His heart, is furnished to us here! We see the Son of God coming into fellowship with a wayward and thoughtless woman, bringing into her view the eternal verities and the best gifts of the kingdom, instructing, awakening, besetting her with wise and holy urgency, and finally making Himself known to her as fitted to her need. On Him lay all the welfare of all the Church of God; but how well that agreed with the expenditure of His grace on this, as it seemed, unlikely stranger! She was far from seeking Him, but He sought her. Who can doubt that to those who seek Him, He will

prove to be the giver of life? "He shall deliver the needy, the poor also, and him that hath no helper; precious shall their blood be in his sight."

And therefore it much concerns some of my hearers to lay to heart the scene here set before us. Look at this Samaritan woman. What was she on that same morning before she met with Christ? She was ignorant and superstitious, her mind beset with the barriers which in every age have proved to be strong to shut truth out. She was prejudiced, armed with Samaritan prepossessions against any gospel that was "of the Jews." She was a sinner, hardened by old sins, living still in sin, and under its power. She went forth careless and unconcerned, occupied only with household business, in as ordinary and earthly a mood of mind as ever went forth in your own person to walk down the street. That was she. And she went to meet the pity and the grace of Christ; to meet love unspeakably strong and wise. Never again was she to go forth the same poor, sin-blighted woman she had been. For her, as we entirely believe, a light was kindled and a life was quickened at that hour, by which all things became new.

Well, perhaps I am speaking—no doubt I am—to some who do not pretend to have any affinity

with what is very devout, very conscientious, very penitent. You are not that kind of person. Your life is full of interests, and goes after objects remote from those regions of feeling. You are living like people around you, content to be as they are. As to religion, you take that as it came to you from your fathers; you don't pretend to have much thought or feeling of your own about it. You remember plain sins of yours done heretofore, you know of sins still indulged; sins of omission and of commission—which make you shrink from too much handling of your conscience, and from thoughts too serious concerning God and God's will. You pretty well succeed in filling your heart and time with the outward things of life, and when you go forth to draw water, it is for the satisfaction of a purely earthly thirst; and you resort for the purpose to springs where you don't expect to meet with any better or more precious water. And you are here to-day, decently reverent in your bearing, but with the same temper of mind still, unaltered, unhealed. How little this seems to promise anything remarkable or important! How little promise it offers of something new and good!

And indeed it is possible—ah! how possible, for you to turn away, declining any real converse

of heart and mind with Christ. You may remain outside, as heretofore, content to depend on water-springs that minister only to a dying life. So, your history may be what the history of this woman would have been, if she had turned in silence from the Jewish stranger at the well; if she had gone home poor and hopeless as before; if the setting sun had found her bound fast by the chain of her sins, as the rising sun had found her; if the service of sin had claimed her remaining years; and if the Lord Jesus had gone on His way with one sorrow more in His heart. That may be so.

But my brother, or my sister, it may be quite otherwise; for salvation and eternal life are near you, are knocking at your door. You have come with ever so little in your mood of mind that promises a result. Yet here you may find yourself face to face with Christ; with One who will tell you all things that ever you did; with One who gives the living water which whoso drinks will never thirst; One who comes to bring you to God, and God to you. Nothing can hinder this but your own perversity. For be sure of this, that the Lord Jesus, clothed with all His attributes of power and love, is near. You must hear His voice or else turn away. And this at least must

be represented to you with all possible earnestness, that "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldst ask of him, and he would give thee living water."

XII

THE APPEAL OF THE HARVEST

"Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."—JOHN iv. 35, 36.

THIS passage follows on the meeting of our Lord with the Samaritan woman at the well; and I think you will feel that the words of Jesus here have a glow and a pathos, due to that recent experience of a Saviour's work. The meeting at the well, seemingly so fortuitous, the natural request for a drink of water, the divine ease and gracefulness with which the conversation is lifted into higher and still higher regions, the way in which a human soul is led on step by step, and every natural principle is made subservient to gracious purposes; lastly, the lifting of the veil which discloses the Messiah that was to come—all these things strike vividly on the mind.

Then, when the woman has gone, the disciples ask their Master to eat; but the thoughts and impressions connected with the recent interview are too present with Him to allow Him to turn at once to common things. There lie before Him, there must be set before the disciples, the condition of men, as needing to be gathered in, and the work of those who gather them, and their reward. It is a Saviour's view of things. It greatly concerned the disciples that they should share in it; it greatly concerns us also. Let us speak first of the harvest; secondly, of the reapers; thirdly, of their reward.

1. The harvest. If their eyes were opened they might see a great harvest whitening all around.

The souls of men do, as it were, make their dumb appeal to Christ, as the crops of a farmer appeal to him to be cared for and preserved from destruction. No doubt sin, infecting men far and near and bringing death in its train, has made sad havoc in human nature. But as the Saviour-head of the economy of grace, the Lord Jesus knew how sinful men could be gathered in to forgiveness, to sonship, and to life eternal. He knew how grace can adapt itself to all the ignominy of human need, and how the evil powers that hold men captive can be overcome by the benignant

might of redemption. His eye saw truly the sad condition of men. Yet there was not a sorrow nor a sin that might not illustrate the healing power of grace; not a wandering soul, but, if recovered and restored, might have its own song of thanksgiving, might bring its own tribute of praise and honour to the Lord. And as there rose before His eye the multitude of human lives, and the sorrows and burdens, the entanglements, the besetting influences of deception and temptation, all the guilt and danger,—and as He felt His own mission into the world to deal with all this, there seemed to spread before Him a great harvest, of which a man must think, "Now for the gathering of it, how shall that be?"—a harvest with its appointed time, its so long and no longer, in which the work must be done. If Christ's servants and friends could but see this as He saw it, and feel it as He felt it,—if they could hear the appeal of the harvest! "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest."

Notice first, then, the preciousness of human souls as the subjects of salvation. The Son of man is Lord of the world and of all things in it; but, in particular, it is His field in which His crop must grow; as it is said in the interpretation of the parable of the sower, "The field is the world."

And that which is reaped, in the gathering in of men and women to the fellowship of Christ, is in a peculiar manner our Lord's return, His growth and increase, His honour and reward out of His field: The heart of Christ is greatly set on this. On this earth of ours, year by year, the spring leads on to summer, and summer mellows into autumn; year by year there are anxious hearts that watch the fortunes of their seed and the progress of the crops; and year by year there is a harvest gladness, as the earth yields her bounteous store—seed for the sower and bread for the eater. But there is one Husbandman whose memories and hopes are linked to the earth by ties that are stronger and more touching: One who went forth long ago, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, bearing precious seed; One who watches the processes by which His harvest ripens, under favourable or under adverse influences, with a care such as earthly husbandmen never knew; One whose final harvest home shall be jubilant with a gladness that the earth cannot contain, and therefore it shall mount into the heavens. Now that which makes it all so full of interest is the preciousness of human souls to Christ.

Notice, secondly, there is such a thing as the ripening of souls for the harvest. Sometimes, no

doubt, this image of seed-time and harvest is so used, that the sowing shall represent the beginning of faith in the heart, and the whitening shall represent the final stage, when no more remains to be done but to take the ripe believer home. But the image may be taken another way. The waving crop still growing in the field can represent men in their various stages and conditions, their various forms of need and capacities of impression, receiving the various influences of Word and Providence, before the decisive gathering in to true submission and true fellowship with Christ. And so it is taken here; for here the reaping is the gathering of men to Christ.

Now, so taken, one can speak of such a thing as the ripening of souls to this harvest. No doubt, at every stage it is the duty of those who hear the word to answer to the call and come. And at any stage of personal history conversion, under the influence of the grace of God, can come to pass. But yet there are states of mind, there is a moral and spiritual stir sometimes in human souls, and a certain disposition to respond to the higher influences which, as it were, bring harvest near. Men are found so awakened and impressed that a Saviour can say, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Communities prove to be

so susceptible to impression that one can say, "The fields are white unto the harvest." Therefore the movements of men's minds, under the various influences that affect them, ought to interest most deeply those who care for the progress of Christ's kingdom. Here, in this passage, we find the Lord Himself looking out with the liveliest interest on the condition of human souls; for—

Notice, thirdly, times of ripening and whitening *may be seen.* "Lift up your eyes and look."

Sometimes in this field the reaper cannot see before him. He must seek to gather in, putting it to proof whether the crop or any part of it is ripe or not, whether any real ingathering can be effected. But sometimes the crop may be seen ripening to invite the reaper; sometimes we ought, as it were, to see that harvest is at hand. We may see it in movements of mind, in changing aspects of society, in hungry and troubled moods of inquiry and expectancy that spread and grow. So our Lord (in addition to what He might for Himself see by divine insight) expected His apostles to discern in that troubled and anxious age a season of special opportunity, to be watchfully noted and diligently improved.

But yet, while this is so, while one period more

than another may awaken legitimate expectations of a harvest that seems near, I think there is a larger meaning in our Lord's saying; for I suppose it applies to the whole dispensation on the borders of which He and His followers were standing—the dispensation of the New Covenant. For Christ was already here, full of grace and truth, the fulness of the times being come; and the great work of redemption was on the point of being achieved; and the dispensation of the Spirit, under which we still live, was at hand—the Spirit who convinces of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us, who opens blind eyes that they may see. Ah! now the time was nigh for harvest, for going forth in a ministry of reconciliation, for seeing Satan like lightning fall from heaven, for preaching everywhere the unsearchable riches of Christ.

My brethren, the death and the exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the dispensation of the Spirit, and the course of God's providence in the world, have all combined to make our dispensation a time of special opportunity, when special expectancy is our duty. We live in a time of limitless possibilities. We ought to feel that at any time the Gospel may evince an energy and a

range of success that cannot be measured beforehand. Even when things seem backward or contrary, when secularity and infidelity have most prevailed, or when old delusions seem to have settled fast on nations and continents, we are never to forget that a combination of divinely-ordered conditions exists, out of which have sometimes come, out of which may come at any time the most startling changes—the ends of the world remembering and turning to the Lord.

But do not the Lord's words suggest that something, that much, may depend on our spiritual insight, on our readiness to *see* the fields whitening? Commonly, I fear, the Lord's servants greatly fail to *see* the true position. We that are ministers, who ought to be reapers, full of zeal and hope, have here our own grounds for consideration. In the administration of grace something was to depend on our watchfulness and insight. We were appointed to cherish an intelligent and loving sympathy with the condition of the multitudes who faint and are scattered and are as sheep that have no shepherd; and we chiefly ought to realise how this sad scene stands related to the kingdom of God and to the heart of Christ. If that were so we should be conscious of our Lord's meaning in the text, and we should be ready for that keen,

enlightened, sympathetic work as reapers, to which the blessing might be given. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields."

Yes, I fear it must be confessed that many of us are, as regards our work, far too much in that mood of mind that is occupied with the obstacles and the unlikelihoods, so that we resign ourselves to expect little and to achieve little; our eyes being sadly dim as to seeing the fields whitening. Too apt we often are to sink into the very same mood of mind about our work—the same mood in which a number of you hearers are about yourselves. For, my brethren, this is the very thing that holds some of you in the miserable emptiness and bondage of the world, that you will not see nor own how the kingdom of God is come nigh to you. How near salvation and eternal life are to you! But you will not see it. It is sad; but if the very reapers themselves fail to see it, how much more sad that is.

I return to the words of our Lord. The next point is—

2. The reapers—those who gather in.

The reapers are opposed, as you see, to the sowers; though in this work it can hardly be that a man shall be, to any good purpose, a reaper who is not a sower too. Earlier and later

labourers in the same part of the field have often been so related that the first were chiefly sowers and the last more emphatically reapers. Some who seem to see little fruit from their work are really preparing the way for others. They labour, and other men enter into their labours.

But I am persuaded that the main thought here is not the distinction between servants who prepare the way and servants who more abundantly reap. I believe the main distinction is between Christ on the one hand, and all His servants on the other. Reapers here include the whole body of Christ's servants concerned by His authority in the work of the Gospel, bringing sinners in, and labouring to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Now, taking it this way—

Notice first, the need of reapers. God indeed has no need of any of us. Yet He is pleased to call men to His service, and to make use of them in His service. Nor is their work a merely ostensible and unreal contribution to the great end in view. If we serve Christ He gives us a real function; and He will not dispense with it. In the propagation of the Gospel, and the gathering in by it of men to faith and obedience, a very great place is given to men; not merely to their outward industry, but to their inward travail.

The exercise of the minds and hearts of believing men striving to apprehend, to explain, and to apply to others what they personally believe, asking for the Holy Spirit and receiving Him, is part of the fitting instrumentality; and so important is it that our Lord, as we read in the gospel according to Matthew (ix. 38), when He contemplates the need and the danger of the multitude, admonishes His disciples to pray for labourers, more labourers; not otherwise does He expect the harvest to be brought in. There is an appointed place for reapers. And well may we prize the honour of having such a place given to us in this great work, and feel the responsibility attaching to it.

Note, secondly, the true work of New Testament reapers. It is to gather in that which another has sown. Although there is a sense in which every true reaper sows as he has opportunity, and though our Lord when on the earth knew something of the joy of reaping, yet truly the Lord is the great Sower. Indeed He is Himself that corn of wheat which fell into the ground and died that it might bring forth much fruit. He has done all, prepared all. We reapers arrive only to gather what comes of His sowing. Our appointed message is "Come, for all things are

ready." We go on an errand, only carrying a message and leaving it at men's doors. Comparatively, ours is a simple and a humble function. And yet it is such as may employ all a man's heart and mind and time; and in the discharge of it, if he is a true servant, a man becomes associated with the views and purposes, the feelings and achievements of the Lord Himself.

So, then, this is one great view of the History of the Church. It is filled with the work of the reapers. Ministers of the Gospel are called to this as their life's work. But many more are also reapers, setting forward the kingdom by gathering in the harvest. Persons who have no official place are sometimes honoured by Christ with opportunities and achievements that stand out among the most splendid. No man or woman that desires to serve is shut out from some share in this work of reaping. Only, it concerns all who are in any way reapers to enter into the Lord's views about the harvest; on this subject our minds ought to be fixed and filled by the steadfast thoughts of Christ.

Let us emphasise it once more that a place is really ours, is conceded to us in the administration of redemption. We "gather fruit unto life eternal." Our work, our thoughts, our prayers,

our anxieties, our conflicts against unbelief, our dealings with men are necessary. And this place, as it is given to us by our Lord, so in the end it will be acknowledged by Him, generously and lovingly acknowledged. So

3. We come to the reaper's reward. "He that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit unto life eternal, that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

He who reaps in this field, like the reapers in our earthly fields, is labouring to gather in not his own harvest, but that of another. The Lord of the harvest, who will not leave unrequited any true work done for Him, takes care to recompense His labourers. He owns the reapers as His servants; He cares for their necessities and their comfort, with a great deal of forgiveness, of help, of encouragement; He maintains their soul in life; He administers to them, not only in general, as He does to the needy when they cry, but in particular as to His own workers; He refreshes them under the burden and heat of the day; He enables them to say with the Apostle Paul "I have all, and abound."

Now being thus provided for and sufficed, while they labour, that might be thought to be wages enough, if wages must have place. He who is

not dependent on their efforts might be thought to have done enough in acknowledgment of their service, when He thus gives them the day's wages for the day's work.

But much more is pointed at here. The Lord calls His servants to take more than a passing interest in their work; and He holds out to them more than a transitory reward. Here it proves true, as on other lines, that "he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."

As to their work, they are to think and feel that they are gathering fruit unto life eternal. They are to realise how noble and great this harvest is, how permanent and great its fruits. This honour has been given them that they work for eternity—yes, for Eternity. By faith they are to apprehend this now, entering into their Lord's thoughts about His harvest and so doing His work; and no doubt in the better country, if they have proved true servants, they will apprehend the reality of this far more adequately. So entering into their Lord's mind, and sharing the movement of His desires and aims, they shall at last share His gladness; for "he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together."

There are those who in some great struggle serve but as soldiers in the ranks, satisfied in

general that the cause is good; and when the day of victory comes they share the triumph and divide the spoil.

But those have a higher reward, whom some patriot leader associates with himself in his anxieties and aspirations, during the turns and eddies of the conflict. Theirs is a great reward if they find themselves joined with him in lifelong friendship and fellowship, rejoicing with him in the ripe result which is at once his and theirs.

What is Christ's own reward? Is it not, first, the unspeakable sense of His Father's approving love? But this His faithful followers share with Him. "I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." Is it not, again, the gladness of His finished work, the sense of all He came to be to the multitude of the saved, and the sense of what they have come to be through Him? But here, too, Christ communicates to us that which is most His own—the gladness of success,—He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.

There is no need to speak of the reaper's unworthiness of things so great; but the lesson it teaches should be deeply considered. Surely all right work must be work in which we enter into

the mind, accept the point of view, seek heart-fellowship with the heart of Him who came into the world to seek and save the lost. How otherwise should our work lead up to the consummation in which Sower and reaper rejoice together?

In our work as servants of the Lord, it is inevitable that there should press upon us continually what may be called the human view of things. We perceive the features of human nature in the men we deal with; we apprehend the immense variety of character and disposition; we have a certain amount of experience as to the average way in which this human nature works under motives of different kinds, and of the limits within which it commonly fluctuates; we are conscious of possessing in our own minds certain materials for argument and appeal, and certain aptitudes, perhaps, for persuasion. And so there arises in our minds an estimate of the human possibilities and likelihoods of result—commonly not too sanguine. It is well for us, I suppose, vividly to realise all these things; otherwise we should miss real elements of our problem, and should fail to apply ourselves, as it is our duty to do, to deal precisely and cogently with the personalities and the facts that come before us. But if this is all, how prone we shall prove to sink into

a mood that savours little of faith, that pursues its round of dogged duty with mechanical activity, or with unexpectant resignation. We must get behind all this, into the immediate presence of Christ. He saw plainly and has foretold frankly how perversely men would deal with His Gospel; and yet He came with the steadfast will to build the kingdom of God, and the sure expectation of achieving all He undertook. Perhaps nothing is more wanting among His servants than the vivid expectation of success, grounded on realisation of the mind of the Master Himself. He does not fail nor is discouraged. All His experience of human perversity, through which He passed so patiently, was pervaded and animated by the unfailing confidence of victory. We too must learn to say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

XIII

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS

"Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."—ACTS xiii. 38.

WE read a great deal in Scripture about the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps there is not any religious phrase more familiar to our ears. Also, in this instance, the sound of the phrase carries to all of us some perceptions of the sense of it; for the notions of guilt, punishment, forgiveness and so forth are brought within the range of our experience in the ordinary course of human affairs. Besides, the forgiveness of sins is a great article of evangelical teaching. The idea of it, therefore, has familiar currency in our minds; it shall be well if it has a correspondingly firm place in our hearts: for according to the Scriptures forgiveness is a fundamental element in the great business of salvation. It gives character to the

whole process of that momentous revolution, and to all the issues of it.

Let us look at the matter for a moment as it comes before us in the ordinary course of human affairs. Forgiveness takes place between man and man, or between individuals in a community and those who represent lawful authority. An offence or wrong is supposed; and some one, a party offended, or a competent authority, has a right to inflict punishment, or to manifest displeasure—for example, by withdrawing friendly relations. The offence lives on and exists, as it were, in these effects or consequences. If now the right to enforce such consequences is no longer maintained but is renounced—if the state of things between the parties returns to what it was, while as yet there was no offence—then we say the offender is forgiven. Instead of the offence still existing as a ground of punishment, or a ground of manifested displeasure, it is in that respect abolished, it is put out of the way. It does not follow that the fact of the offence having taken place is forgotten. As a rule, it neither is nor ought to be. He who forgives retains the consciousness of an unhappy relation happily surmounted; he who is forgiven should cherish a sense of regret for

wrong done and of obligation for forgiveness granted.

This is the forgiveness which it is our duty in fit cases to grant to one another. Let us notice, now, that in all these cases what takes place is, after all, comparatively superficial. It is only to a small extent that men can take hold of a sin, of an offence, either to recompense it or to pardon it—that is, if the case is one of real moral wrong-doing. Any consequences men can legitimately make to follow on our offendings, are, in their own nature, temporary and external only. And so, what really takes place in human forgiveness (and I do not undervalue either the obligation of it, or its importance as part of our discipline in this life, but still what takes place in it) is only in effect this, that while the offence ceases as between men, it is remitted to the offender's conscience and to God. His fellow who was wronged, the human authority whose law was broken, are to let him alone as far as they are concerned. But then how far are they concerned? Only to external and temporary effects.

Is there a forgiveness which reaches our essential obligations as sinners, which really removes our guilt, which breaks the chain that binds us to our past offendings? In the court

where conscience deals with God—God from whom we come, to whom we go, in whom we live and move—God to whom in every part and power of our nature we hold relations as necessary as existence itself—can there be forgiveness there? There is forgiveness among men; among men there may be much accommodation of things to what is possible, or to what seems profitable, in a state like ours. But here, in the region of principles and of realities, where sin comes up to be dealt with according to its own nature and deservings—my sin which I never can recall—which is my creature that I have created,—can anything reach so deep as to annul the offence of that without abolishing me? Can I be forgiven?

The testimony of the Gospel is that there is forgiveness. And it is God's. There is forgiveness with God. He, dealing with all that makes us blameworthy and calls for our condemnation, forgives. That which makes the gravamen of our sin is the relation in which it stands—in which we in sinning stand to the holy authority of God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." God's forgiveness reaches home to the heart of the case. It really relieves the sinner from the guilt of his sin, and sets him at peace

with God. The burden is not cast back merely, into some inner chamber of the soul; it is taken out and cast away. The humbling remembrance of sin, the consciousness of the immense mercy which forgives it, remains; it ought always to remain; but that remembrance is reconciled with the consciousness of a real and abiding peace with God, and with all the family of God. The sin that cleaved to the man, that said to him, "Thou art mine and I am thine for ever," is separated from him. The guilt of it can claim him no more. This forgiveness, therefore, is divinely great. It "belongeth unto the Lord."

There is reason to fear that many a nominal Christian, in the room of this divine forgiveness, is content with this only, viz. that he has, freely enough, forgiven himself. There is a great difference between God's forgiving you and your forgiving yourself. No two things are more diverse.

This divine forgiveness comes to pass "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." He "made peace through the blood of his cross." So here it is said to be preached to us "through this man." The fact that forgiveness to us stands connected in this way with the atonement of Christ, is enforced throughout the New Testament.

The connection is not only real in itself, but most important to be laid to heart by us. Two things are clearly implied in it. First, forgiveness could not fitly arise for us without the atonement of Christ. Men may think that God, being, as He is, most merciful, might simply pass over and forgive our sins without more ado. But the reason against this lies in the nature of sin and its ill desert. Sin which deserves death and separates from God, was not to be forgiven in that way. Secondly, whatever the burden was, whatever the difficulty that stood against sinners, Christ in His atonement bore the strain of it, and put it away. He "bore our sins in his own body on the tree." Christ bore the whole burden of our sins, as these barred the way for us to real and eternal welfare.

The love and mercy of God are seen in this divine sacrifice achieved for our sake, achieved in order that forgiveness might be real, worthy,—such as rests the conscience and the heart.

I am not going to dwell on this, though it was fit to advert distinctly to it. But my object at present is not so much to speak of the method of God in providing forgiveness, as of the manner in which we are to welcome and receive it. This is suggested by the text when it is said that "through this man is preached to us the forgive-

ness of sins." It is "preached to us." That is the point I wish you to attend to now.

It is conceivable that forgiveness (in an intelligible sense of that word) might be conveyed to us without any preaching of it. Whether in that case it would be so worthy is another matter; but the thing itself is conceivable. God might forgive men by, so to say, passing an act to that effect without holding any communication with them about it; so that they should know neither the fact that forgiveness is in general available, nor anything about their own forgiveness, till they died and met God in judgment. In that case there would be, on the part of the forgiven, no moral agreement with God, no acceptance of settled relations with Him.

But that is not so. Forgiveness is preached or declared to us; and by this preaching God saves them that believe. Therefore God deals with us about this forgiveness, and calls us to deal with Him. He speaks to us and expects an answer. As forgiveness is on God's part given, so on man's part it is expected to be taken and accepted. God holds it out to us for that purpose by preaching. Men are to come into the enjoyment of forgiveness in the way of willingly receiving it; and on the other hand they may reject the counsel of

God against themselves, and so remain unforgiven. More particularly it is preached "through this man." It shall be received in believing on Jesus Christ, in whom it is proposed and offered to us. In believing on Christ a man does accept and embrace forgiveness in Him. An act of that kind is implied in believing on such a Saviour as Christ is. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." In stating this, I do not limit God's merciful procedure in cases where preaching is precluded—the case of little children for instance, and other cases where announcement of Gospel tidings is impossible. That is not our case; and we may leave it in the hands of Him whose mercies are over all His works.

This is the point on which I desire you to fix your attention for the present. True believing involves a hearty acceptance of the forgiveness which God proposes to bestow, and which He holds out to us in the Gospel. That man is not truly believing on Christ, or certainly he is not becoming partaker of this blessing, who is not heartily accepting God's forgiveness. I grant that in the

exercise of faith different men may be specially occupied with different aspects of good in which the grace of Christ more specially comes home to them. Or a man, in believing, may not be thinking, distinctly and specifically, of the different blessings comprehended in the great salvation, and how they are to be dealt with. He may be occupied with the one great thought of Christ as, in every way, the very Saviour for him. But I say that Jesus Christ is such a Saviour, and forgiveness is so held out in Him, that in heartily believing on Christ the hearty acceptance of the divine forgiveness of sins will be found to be included. And I do not see how any man of whom this is not true can warrantably be regarded as a truly believing, and as a forgiven man. I say the hearty acceptance of it. In dealing with men we may take the benefit of the forgiveness which they accord, whether we heartily receive it or not. But when we come to the Gospel and the faith which responds to it, then the matter lies between the heart and Him who tries the heart.

Well, but why make so much of this point? There can surely be no doubt, it will be said, about a man's accepting forgiveness, if it can be had. A man in certain moods might object to repentance,

even as a gift. Or a rebellious and stubborn heart may prompt him to object to the way in which, according to the Scriptures, forgiveness has become available for men; and so a man may be conceived to hold off on that ground. But surely forgiveness in itself is that which no man can object to receive. Well, let it be considered. What is this forgiveness which is proclaimed to us?

This forgiveness is God's, His only. It is God who says, Forgiveness is mine: I forgive thee all trespasses. Therefore also it is a forgiveness ordered in its principles and in the scale of its operation according to the divine view of right and wrong—according to the breadth and height of that Law which we have transgressed, and which measures our transgression. God comes near to us and takes relation to us in the forgiveness of sins. To receive the divine forgiveness is not merely to entertain the idea that somehow, after all, no harm is to come to us; we are to go scot free, and that is the whole affair. No, my brethren; it means that we come to an agreement with God in the forgiveness of sins.

If so, then in accepting with the heart this divine forgiveness, there is an acknowledgment of God as God; there is a recognition of our sin as it has earned the divine condemnation. In

doing this we own ourselves to be in the wrong, according to God's judgment of the wrong, and we accept forgiveness of all that wrong; which implies also the owning of God to be altogether in the right. Is it possible in the nature of things, that I should really and sincerely accept this forgiveness, as long as my heart persists in refusing to own that Holy One as my God; as long as I reckon the Divine Will revealed as the rule of my life, and violated by my sins, to be something exaggerated, unreasonable; something, therefore, to be held at a distance—never allowed to come home to me? In accepting forgiveness, I own God as God—so He and I come together in the forgiveness of sins; and I own the obligation of His holy Will—so I consent to it, that He is in the right and I am wrong—quite wrong. My brethren, it has proved to be very natural for us to maintain an attitude different from this; to be willing to grant to God a good deal of homage, but not the universal rights of God—to confess that we are not what we ought to be, but not so far in the wrong as the extravagant standard of God's Law would appear to imply. Very well; as long as that is so, I do not say to you that you cannot get God's forgiveness, but I say you cannot take it. It is not in your nature. On those

terms you cannot close with God in the forgiveness of sins.

Consider, suppose some one—a perfect stranger let us say, were to come up to you and to address you in this way—"All your life long and up to this moment, you ought to have been laying out all your income for my benefit; you have wronged me exceedingly by your perpetual failure to do it. However, let no more be said, I am willing to forgive you, and I do freely forgive you." Could you accept that forgiveness? Must you not say —"I have done you no wrong; I have been under no obligation to burden myself with your interests: you have no right to offer me forgiveness, and I refuse to take it." You might indeed pretend to accept the forgiveness, if some motive existed to induce you to practise that piece of insincerity, but it could only be a pretence; your real feeling must needs be that which I have described. Again, suppose a man to meet you whom you have injured to some small extent, by some accidental negligence, and from whom therefore so far, you would be glad to receive forgiveness; but suppose he were to say to you, "Ah but you ought to have felt for me and shown to me a filial affection; you should have spent your days and nights in caring for my interests,—in

so far as you have not acted so you have done me an inexcusable wrong. However, all that wrong I freely forgive you." Here, again, I say, could you take that forgiveness? Would not your heart protest against it? Would you not say, "I am quite ready to confess my fault as far as it existed, and so far I should be glad to know that you forgave it. But you have no right to impute such wrong, or to offer such forgiveness. I repudiate and reject it."

Just so then, the Godhead claims of God—the divine judgment of the evil of human sin (two sides of one thing)—are involved, embosomed, in the forgiveness proposed to us. When God forgives, He, as it were, says, "Sinner, I am He against whom thou hast sinned, whose standard of life thou hast refused to observe, against whose law thou hast counted it a light thing to rebel. Disowned, disobeyed, defied, I am thy God—I maintain my right against thy wrong, and I forgive thee all this wrong." He that accepts this forgiveness, does then (if then for the first time) bow down; he owns the immensity of his transgression, as measured by the mind of God and seen in the light of God,—then, if then for the first time, his heart bows to God's sentence, and says, "My God." And if a man cannot or will

not come to this, then suppose God to speak to him from heaven, revealing to him specifically and particularly that Christ died for him, and holding out to him, as it were, pardon, signed and sealed, it would be simply impossible for that man, *continuing so*, really and inwardly to take it at God's hand.

And this is just the state of countless unbelievers. The carnal heart is usually quite ready to grant that God may maintain certain claims, and may indicate them by a law, if those claims are of a limited and, as it would say, a reasonable kind, and if the guilt of transgression is not estimated too seriously. So far, perhaps with some difficulty, it might be brought to accept forgiveness. But God does not forgive in that manner nor on those terms. He as your God forgives you all your wrong as He sees and judges it. If you are to accept this really, it must be as accepting and submitting to the righteousness of God. That is what the carnal heart turns away from. Really to own God in the relation to yourself which belongs to Him,—that is intolerable to the carnal heart—even in the way of receiving God's forgiveness. It is a great change which passes on a man in the moment when his heart first says to the Lord, "Ah! Lord God, how thank-

fully I accept and embrace in Christ my Lord Thy forgiveness of sins."

I may be speaking to some who would candidly admit that they have come to no rest about this business of forgiveness. Yet they have had thoughts about it. And the result on the whole is a kind of querulous impatience, as if you were baffled unfairly, as if there were some deception in the case. You say, perhaps, "be the cause what it will, we can make nothing of this business; we cannot get hold of it. We would gladly be forgiven, but this evangelical doctrine of forgiveness is a spectre that eludes our grasp."

Yet there is no delusion in it; it is a substantial, divine reality which is preached to you—the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. Only whereas you say you cannot get at it, open your eyes to see that the truth is you will not take it. If you have not seen that to be so, try the point to-day when you go home. Go upon your knees and deal with God about the matter, and see whether this element in God's forgiveness, His undiminished claim to be your God, in His own sense of the term, is not the difficulty—whether that is not what the heart rises at and resists. You could take a forgiveness which meant that as regards the past, God and you were to let one another alone.

But to God's forgiveness as it is, you have an insuperable aversion. So you do not come to the point of believing with the heart in the Lord Jesus, to the effect of accepting the forgiveness of sins.

And mark, therefore, what sort of sinner you are. How well it is said that unbelief in Christ is the critical and crowning fact which convicts us of sin. For the meaning of it is simply this, that you have an insuperable objection to God. It is not merely God's law, as to the extent of obedience it requires, not merely God's wrath as it threatens sin with doom, that you object to. For when God takes His place in relation to you, in a way of all ways the most singularly gracious, in a free and complete divine remission of sins, you cannot find in your heart to comply with it. Yes, you object to have God for your God; and so you cannot welcome Him even in forgiveness. What a state for a creature of God to be in!

But is this a difficulty only for some of us? Is it not rather the common difficulty of us all? For which of us has adequately measured the iniquity of his own sin? And which of us is able to adjust himself to the majesty of God's law, and to the holiness of His character? And which of us might not have ground to doubt the simplicity, the reality of his own submission, even

if he did try to bow to the authority so long neglected, and to own the obligations so long forgotten or explained away? Ah! who are we that we should adequately deal with God—even about that which is so gracious as the forgiveness of our sins? But here we find how much it means, that Christ has come between. The Lord Jesus came down to save us, dying for our sins, taking on His own heart our misery and our need, while He abode always in the love of His Father, in whom His whole soul rested. The Lord Jesus, as He claims our trust in Him, and our consent to all He is, to all He came to be, has a strange power to persuade us and enable us. He persuades us to come to Him on the footing that He is right, ah, so absolutely right, and we ourselves so plainly wrong. We consent, we do consent, that all shall be *as He sees it*, and we shall learn from Him, in time and in eternity, what that comes to. We could not live by the Father; but Christ lives by the Father, and we live by Christ; and as we do so, the Father who sent the Son takes His place in our hearts, and we trust all our case in the hands of the Son and of the Father. We find God in Christ reconciling us to Himself. And ah, how gladly do we accept and embrace the forgiveness of our sins—not merely as we see

them or measure them, but as Christ sees them—as He dealt with them. Yes, we trust in Him; and hand in hand with Him we find ourselves before the Father; and we bow willingly and thankfully and with contrite hearts to Him.

How clear it is from this point of view that faith contains within itself the principle of repentance. It does so if it is true faith; for it accepts the forgiveness of sin. It accepts the judgment which condemns sin as exceeding sinful. It comes into lowly agreement with Him who is the eternal goodness. These two, faith and repentance, belong together, and each of them tests the reality and the sincerity of the other. When, indeed, you come to God in Christ for forgiveness, then at last your "uncircumcised heart is humbled," then you "accept of the punishment of your iniquity" (Lev. xxvi. 41).

Once again note the mistake of those who think that being forgiven is a merely negative thing—God agrees, as it were, to let us alone—not to visit us with the desert of our sin. Is that the true view? Well, forgiveness may be the name appropriate to the remission of our guilt; but in being forgiven we return to God and have peace with God. Forgiveness may be negative, as it negates or takes away guilt; but guilt itself

is negative as it negates peace with God. Forgiveness ushers us into a new and blessed world of good. When we receive it we are entering into blessed relations with God through the forgiveness of sins. He is making Himself ours. The capital thought about forgiveness is that God in it, is coming to us, is bringing us, "reconciling" us, to Himself.

This "preaching" does not concern those alone who have hitherto been impenitent. It continues to be a root principle of the new life for all the followers of Christ. Forgiveness leads in every other blessing of the Covenant; and every blessing, on to the end, is baptized in the forgiveness of sins. Adoption, sanctification, peace of conscience, spiritual joy, growth in grace, perseverance to the end—how good they are, each in its own place! And yet, we miss the real meaning of them, unless we mark how each of them is underlaid and is pervaded by the grace of forgiveness. These things God does for us, this, and this, and this—"having forgiven us all trespasses." They all come to us from the Lord God, merciful and gracious, who pardons iniquity, transgression, and sin; who gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but should have life everlasting.

XIV

THE PROSPECT OF DYING

"Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better."—PHIL. i. 23.

"Jesus Christ died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him."—1 THESS. v. 10.

THERE are differences between Christian and Christian, and these of many kinds: differences of disposition, of experience, of attainment. But all such diversities are small, compared with the great privileges in which they are one; one Lord, one faith, one hope, one love kindled by the same almighty Spirit—all these are theirs. It is therefore radically one history which belongs to them all, though endlessly varied in detail. It is one and the same grace which pours itself along the channels of all their lives. They are all partakers of one eternal life in Christ Jesus, their Lord. So also each Christian passes through very

diverse stages of outward circumstances and inward history. Yet one of these texts reminds us that one unbroken life persists for them from first to last. Although a great break interposes in every human existence—that of death—a great shattering break in its continuity and its progress; yet in the case of each Christian this is bridged (or it is underlaid) by that which nothing can break. A life sustained by One who cannot die, administered to them by a love that cannot fail, is theirs all through. Did not Christ die for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we might live together with Him? He who, in the life of this world, wakes to labour or sleeps in peace, in either case equally, is alive. Even as little is *their* true life affected by the great change. Whether they wake or sleep, they live together with Him. He is great enough and loving enough to uphold them all through with everlasting arms. He died that He might do it, and now He lives to do it.

When, therefore, we are looking at a Christian's history, and meditating on what lies on *this* side, and what on *that* side, we are still to feel that both are portions of one life and are to be compared under a sense of the fundamental unity of both. The believer lives with Christ here, and he lives with Christ there. Yet a difference

also is to be observed between the two stages; and it is important that it should not only be observed but realised. Of the two, the second is better than the first; to depart and be with Christ is far better. Both are good, for there is in both the grace of Christ, in both the might of the Spirit's work, in both redemption. But that which in the one is experienced but in part, is perfect in the other. "Therefore," says the Apostle, "I have a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." He was living with Christ here, but he was to be with Him far more fully, nearly, uninterruptedly there. And therefore he said, It is far better to depart: let mortality be swallowed up of life.

The second is better than the first. Every Christian knows this—assured of it in faith; but to have a practical and powerful sense of it, is usually an attainment reached by Christian training, not reached at once, nor equally by all. There is room here for a great variety of experience. It is with reference to this experience of believers that I wish to consider the matter now. Let us notice some of the influences which bear on a Christian's mode of thinking and feeling with regard to this subject.

We find a sunshine of life, of this earthly life

of ours, arising from elements of comfort provided by the kindness of God. The brightness and warmth of this sunshine the young feel most, generally speaking; though there are some that seem to carry their youth in this respect with a happy buoyancy to the end. And he who believes in Christ does not become insensible to it. It is not indeed so indispensable to him as it once was; and the sunshine of another better life has become more precious to him. Still, this sunshine of the earthly life may be given by God, and received by him with a fresh unaffected cheerfulness. He is glad of it, while it is given, because light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to behold the sun. And he may take occasion by it to bless His name who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

But as a believer he has become partaker of eternal life in Christ; and so new convictions and new desires are present in his soul. God has become to him his Father and his treasure; the promises lead him into a new region of truth and hope, of which henceforward he is a citizen. How does he find it to be in this region, this sphere of being, this new side of things, now pertaining to all that he engages in? Why as to this, it is the night season, while this life on earth lasts. It is night, though the day be at hand.

Compared indeed with what might have been, and once *was* his condition, it is not night, but life and light and gladness. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." But compared with that which he has now become capable of receiving, which he *must* desire, which he looks soon to see,—it is night.

It is night, and therefore things are not so clear to his eye as he fain would have them; many are descried but dimly and vaguely; many cannot be seen at all, though a conviction of faith about them may be kept up. It is night, and some enemies, seducers, layers of snares, have an advantage against him here, so as to put him to a painful watchfulness, yea, and to grieve him by too much success obtained against him. It is night, and while he journeys and must journey on, it is an effort, sometimes a painful effort, to keep up due watchfulness as he goes. It is night, and therefore not such a warm and genial time for this life of his, as a time he hopes to see.

Not that it is mere gloom. There are companions with him in the way. There is One especially whose lamp of light is never far from the path of his feet, and whose voice has a tenderness he could hardly mark so well, if he heard it not by night. There are multitudes of

stars on high, and one bright and morning star towards which to bend his course. There is light enough after all, to give him glimpses of the territory of God's goodness spread out around him. Yes, and surely after the sun that shall go down no more has risen upon him, the memories of his journey by night shall be treasured up for ever in his heart.

But however well provided for, it is night still. Hence comes often in the heart of a believer a strange commingling of the experience of two diverse seasons. There is, as to one sphere of his being—the earthly—a great deal of the feeling of daylight and sunshine, enjoyed (or if not enjoyed, yet remembered), so that his conceptions of earthly wellbeing are drawn from experiences he has had: they are definite and clear. But, as to the other sphere, he is waiting for a brightness he has never seen, and his heart yearns for a daylight yet to be revealed.

Now, he who is a Christian indeed is so minded that it is this second sphere of his being, with its spiritual capacities, employments, and conflict that is the main one. To him it is not now of so much weight that he should have the sunshine of this earthly life, as that he should walk by the call of Christ, in fellow-

ship with Christ, and should be going forward to an eternal day. Also, as he advances, this becomes increasingly the case. Not perhaps less sensible to God's earthly goodness, he is yet more occupied with and bent upon what is spiritually precious. This, he more and more feels, is his true, his proper life. Here is his portion, here his work, here his dwelling-place is building. And so, more and more, he *feels* all that makes it to be night. There are works of God he longs to see, and he cannot; there is warmth of love he longs to feel, and he cannot; there is erring and stumbling he would fain be free from, and he cannot. It is night, he says; and it is good, indeed, to be walking with an unseen Christ, guided by His word and Spirit, cheered with His voice, onward to eternal day: it is good; yet so that there is something better. Yea, to depart and be with Christ is far better.

Now this is promoted by the wise administration of God's discipline, which helps on the believer, not indeed to despise God's earthly goodness, which we have called the sunshine of this life, yet to set it in its own subordinate place, and so to be awake and covetous for spiritual contentment, with desires that long for the day, and that find it to be not day as yet. This dis-

cipline is too various to be adequately described. Sometimes it lies much in outward providences, sometimes more in inward workings of the mind, lessons given there; sometimes it is more severe and rough, sometimes more gentle and gradual. Sometimes it fulfils its office early, so that much of life follows on the administration, and is lived, as it were, in the light of it; and sometimes late (as to the emphatic lessons of providential discipline), so that the light is, as it were, thrown back upon the past, and the mind becomes, at the end, conscious of the significance of life and its lessons in a way it never was before. Sometimes also the discipline is more equally diffused over the whole course of life. But the effect is still the same, though reached by means inexpressibly various. It is, that the soul set free more and more from bondage to the things and to the happiness of earth, and caring for the true and permanent good, finds how truly it is night here, and longs for the day, for the scene and the time when we shall be "like him, seeing him as he is."

All this may let us see through what various kinds of training men come to be feelingly persuaded that the other side is indeed far better. It may be useful, however, to illustrate this point a little more particularly by a reference to specific

elements of the Christian life and the Christian hope.

First, let us speak of *love*. Love, as the foundation of all the varieties of friendship and of mutual regard, enters very largely into the sunshine of the earthly life of which I spoke. It is one chief constituent of the earthly happiness which God gives to man. Now the believer enters by faith into a new world of love. Himself the object of a love that passes knowledge, his heart's affections begin to expand towards One who better deserves and is more able to secure his regard, than the very dearest of those he loves on earth. And this second love is the greatest; for he who loves not Jesus Christ best, has yet to learn what it is to love Him. Yet the new does not chill the old; rather it imparts to the old a deeper truth and a tenderer grace. So that he who lives in love to One in heaven, supremely loved, and to many on the earth, may be at times, and for a long time, in a mood that shrinks from changes—as not caring to think what change might bring, in a state of things that seems so good. How blessed, to have all this, and Jesus Christ too! He could not dispense with Christ, he cleaves to Him. Yet it seems so good to be environed with so much of earthly love, that desiring as he does

to grow in love to Jesus, he yet shrinks from any change that should part him from others that are so dear.

But if he be a growing Christian another feeling by and by masters this one; masters it by degrees, as life fulfils its years, or else is suddenly found to have mastered it when death comes unexpectedly near, and calls him to depart. It is a feeling of desire, in reference to the love of Christ and of God, that finds no adequate contentment here. As he realises how much he has to do with that love, he longs to feel it more brightly and more warmly that it can be felt in this time of night, he longs to return it more heartily than he ever shall do here. So that a hope draws him forward, a hope of "knowing the love that passeth knowledge." As he grows richer, a longing to be yet more rich makes him feel poorer, and he is desirous to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better.

Or again, let us speak of *knowledge*. Any one that lives an earnest life and at the same time an intelligent one, desires to know the nature and the laws of those things which surround him in his sphere of life. God, therefore, has enabled us to gather much knowledge of His works, that therein we may exercise faculties that are akin to the

attributes of His own nature. He made our minds for light, and not only in relation to the things of earth, but also in the spiritual life, there is a knowledge that leads and guides, a knowledge not cold and speculative but full of life and power, humbling and transforming, summed up in the knowledge of God and of His Son. And here the first impression may be one of satisfaction and rest, when one sees (with a certainty proportioned to the peculiar evidences that attend God's revelation) the light of the knowledge of God, and the solid foundation for the eternal hopes of man. Rejoicing in this, learning more and more of this, as the quiet days progress, how pleasant to turn, and with the sense of inward peace, with the feet steady on the true foundation, to peruse the works of God, and the gatherings of human minds; conscious as we do so, that the joy of a deeper and more precious knowledge underlies the interest of other studies; that a securer treasure than can be found in these is ours for ever. And yet, as the Christian follows out the leadings of the Word, and lives more amid the objects and facts and relationships which the Word reveals, does he not become keenly conscious that all he learns here, glorious and sure as it may be, is but the rudiment of a fuller knowledge yet to be unveiled? For "we know

in part and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. "Now I know in part" —nay, there is nothing that I do know in the things of God in which I am not to remember that it *is* a part only, and not the whole that is revealed—"now I know in part; then shall I know even as also I am known." What wonder, then, if the believing heart turns more and more to rest on the sure hope coming; and thinks wistfully upon the time when we shall all come into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man—unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ!

The same thing may be illustrated by a reference to the *activities* of a Christian's life. He who is made alive unto God through Christ shares, so far, in the Spirit of Christ, that he delights to do the will of his Father in heaven. He is called to be a fellow-worker with God, and just as much of the enjoyment of the earthly life depends on the exercise of our natural powers and faculties in appropriate work, so the higher life finds its natural outcome in those works of faith and labours of love, with a view to which God has created it. Here the Christian finds scope for the exercise of his noblest powers. He has something worth

living and labouring for,—and in a world like this he has some opportunities of serving God, which perhaps exist nowhere else. He has much to do here, and the time is short for doing it. At times he may feel as if he could hardly bear to have his plans cut short and his work interrupted, by the summons to depart hence.

And yet all his work here is a perpetual warfare. An enemy is counter-working him at every point, yea, countless enemies within and without, so that he must keep a weapon in one hand, while he builds with the other. And how often is he thwarted by those who mean to help him; how much do his own errors, infirmities, and sins mingle with his service and debase it! That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. He sees but dimly yet how God's glorious providence is marching on to ends that are subserved by all the chequered incidents of this earthly scene. What comes home to him most keenly may be his own blunders and disappointments, and the vanity and vexation of spirit that encompass him continually. And so he is led to long to be with Christ, where His servants shall serve Him without weariness, and beyond the reach of conflict, error, or decay. He comes to feel that here he must sow in patience

and in tears, but the reaping-time of joy is yonder. To depart and be with Christ is far better.

So much may suggest some of the elements of experience which, variously combined, give occasion to an endless variety of tone, of feeling, on this particular point, among those who believe. Before concluding I wish to point out to you another principle which comes into play, in the way of crossing and modifying the experiences spoken of before, and so introduces a new variety.

Is it not well if one has come to feel that to depart is better, so that he thinks on it, and waits for it with thankful gladness? Surely it is well. And yet He who sits as a Refiner, may see that more is needed;—another element of feeling and experience must be developed, if the Christian is to be rightly minded about his passage into everlasting day. It is necessary not only that Christians should count the blessings great which await them there, but that they should realise the greatness of the mercy which brings themselves safe home to enjoy them,—that saving love and kindness which is indeed the very kernel and heart of every blessing heaven shall disclose. There might be too light an exultation about the prospect of that blessed entering in. Therefore God, who calls and enables His children to count departing

to be with Christ far better, also provides that they shall be brought to a very lowly sense of that unworthiness of theirs, which does not bar them out, and of their dependence for every moment's upholding, and for final victory on the power and the pity of a Father in heaven.

Now, whatever is solemn in human life—in the condition of men as having to do with God, assembles itself about our departing in the hour of death. Hence, if it be the proper triumph of Christian faith to hail the prospect of departing, it is no less the appropriate exercise of Christian penitence to feel, in regard to that departing, a peculiar lowliness of dependence on God's power and God's compassion. For indeed, Death that came first into this world as an executioner to do justice on us, is a mighty enemy: and it is not fit that we should hide from ourselves how great and strange a thing it is that he should become our servant and our friend. It is not fit that any believer should die without a solemn sense of the depth and glory of the mercy that makes him triumphant in that war.

To die! Is it not a solemn thing? To be smitten of that which separates soul and body with a most unnatural and hideous divorce. To have life summed up and sealed up, that its results

may now abide unchangeable. To go forth into a new state of existence of which we have no experience; in which, alone and infinitely far from all our wonted resources, we are absolutely lost if God be not for us. To go, by this portal, to encounter the reality of eternal Justice and eternal Truth dealing with us in judgment. This is so tremendous a thing for any sinful man, that it is not fit for him to pass it without a very contrite sense of the divine depth of the compassion that rescues him, and bears him through.

And so, while the Lord teaches His children to understand that to be with Christ is indeed far better, He often also provides that they shall be deeply sensible of the mercy that lands them safe in the enjoyment of eternal rest. Sometimes for this purpose He makes use of the natural shrinking from death, and from its stern accompaniments, allowing these to press the spirit sorely; so that deliverance, given in the end, comes as timely help indeed. Sometimes the bright anticipations of the Christian are crossed with a solemn sense of sin, with dark impressions of its dreadful and measureless evil, and a deep consciousness of ill desert—all fitted to make him come, in the prospect of dying, to the foot of the cross, in a specially contrite and dependent frame of spirit.

Sometimes, also, these impressions are recurrent through life, and sometimes they are more consciously realised (in this connection) at the end. They may be mingled also with the working of unbelief, in some cases more, in others less. But while the experience of God's children varies under all these forms, still the foundation holds. Christ has died in order that, whether they wake or sleep, they may live together with Him.

For reasons which have been indicated, I am very far from thinking that it is Scriptural to reckon all (ourselves or others) to be in an unchristian state, who cannot say that they have at the present time a desire to depart. Every believer, indeed, is persuaded that the full deliverance and the full salvation constitute the hope for him, and he cannot rest short of them. Yet I do cordially admit that there are many believers, I suppose too many, to whose experience this precise mode of feeling is not by any means familiar, so that it should arise naturally as their present and heartfelt aspiration. But yet this must be asserted and earnestly pressed, that to depart and be with Christ *is* far better. It may, in God's judgment, be needful that a certain number of years of life, many perhaps, should pass over a believer in this world, with their discipline,

their conflicts, their ripening influence, their peculiar lessons; or that may not be so—a few days or weeks may accomplish all God's purposes touching him. But whichever way it be, to depart and be with Christ, come when it may, is that which is far better—an advancement in blessedness and wellbeing with which nothing attainable here can be equalled. Yes, it is better to be done with sin; it is better to be, with the whole undivided heart, adhering to the Lord. It is better to have Christ's love expressed without anything to mar or perplex our experience. It is better to be safe home, where falls and stumbling-blocks and mistakes are impossible—to be above the region where decay and death reign, and where a sadness that ever prophesies of a deeper sadness thrills through our happiness even when we have it. Where Christ most fully, most manifestly, most unreservedly is, that is best. To be with Him is far better.

Not only should we steadfastly believe this; we ought also to feel it, so as to be under its soothing and elevating influence, seeking a better country, that is an heavenly.

Not that we are to be impatient of life in this world, even when it is sad and trying; for as God sees it to be best for us in the meantime, so the

hope set before us, duly cherished, does not make us to weary, but rather establishes the heart with a sublime patience. Nay, nor that we should always (even with submission to God who appoints us to stay) be longing instantly to depart; but so that the prospect of departing in God's time, to us unknown, should be a great and bright hope before us—the refuge of our hearts in trouble; the retreat into which we go, when we would soothe and cheer our souls; a great element of the cheerfulness and patience of our lives;—while we assure ourselves that the best of all we find here, is by and by to give place to that which is far better. I am not laying it down that every believer has attained this habitual frame; but it is in the line of his calling that he should attain it.

The call of the Gospel implies it. Let a man come under the full and comprehensive influence of that call, so as to know and feel what it calls him *from*, and what it calls him *to*, and how really, certainly, effectually, lovingly it calls him; and surely his first resolve, "I will arise and go to my Father," will be followed, by and by, as he compares all he is here with what he is to be there, by the impulse—"I will arise and depart hence to be with Christ, which is far better." "I will behold

thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

And the earnest of the Spirit implies it. "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession." That is good—it is very good; of the very marrow of the promise of eternal life, a blessed beginning, a sure and true foretaste is here given. But are we so to rest in the earnest, as not to long for the inheritance? Nay, rather, if the first-fruits be so good, what and how glorious shall the harvest be!

That life is indeed far better. Why, then, should we grudge our friends to it, if we have reason to believe that, absent from the body, they are present with the Lord? Rather let our hearts follow them whither they are gone, setting our affection on things above, where our life is hid with Christ in God. "Whether we wake or sleep, we live together with Him"; this is our faith. "To depart and to be with Christ, which is far better"; this is our hope. My friends, do these make up the secret of the life we live? Is ours in some measure that glorious life in which a sinner cleaves to Christ, and has made good to him, a faith that holds by eternal truth, and a hope that shall never

make ashamed? Here is that which is real, worthy, enduring. Let earth be as it will, with its persons and its things, Christ is, and He is all that the Gospel declares Him. He *does* save, even so as the Scripture declares. He does love with a love that passes knowledge. What is He to us? What place has He won—does He keep, in our hearts?

If you do love Christ, then remember that whatever attainments we have spoken of as effected by divine grace in believers, are to them also matter of obligation. Seek to be by grace so made aware of your proper destiny and of your high calling in Christ, to be so occupied with your interests and your obligations as a spiritual being, that while you bless God for all you have here, you shall become increasingly conscious that there is something far better, which you cannot but desire and wait for.

And above all seek to live as those who are to die. Do not make dying a separate thing from living. Let the one and the other be continuous parts of one unbroken fellowship with Christ; so that you may die at last, departing to that which is far better, on the self-same principles and grounds on which you have gone about any day's or any hour's avocations. Whether you live, live

unto the Lord, and whether you die, die unto the Lord. Be not content to live any life save the life of faith, knowing and loving the Son whom the Father hath sent; that so, come when it may, and it may come when you look not for it, death may come as the fitting next step in your fellowship with Christ; and may pass you only forward into a fuller experience of the good things which grace indeed gives us here, but which glory gives more perfectly in the daylight of heaven.

XV

MUTABILITY AND ENDURANCE

(Preached on occasion of the death of Rev. William Arnot, Free High Church, Edinburgh, 1875)

"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."—1 PETER i. 24, 25.

THE frail and transient state of man, which is the first thing here set before us, is a commonplace topic. All human experience is a commentary upon it. If the young can forget it, men have it forced upon them, more and more obtrusively, as they live to grow old. Yet it needs to be still reverted to; for the tendency of human life is to assume its own persistency, and to deceive itself by that assumption. Here the topic is brought up, not for the purpose of triumphing over the

littleness and vanity of men, but in order to guide us to the secret of an enduring vigour, a continuous, persistent, victorious wellbeing. Doubtless man withers like the grass; yet over against this is set the redeeming virtue which holds out an immortal hope—life and length of days for ever and ever. Let us, then, consider—

I. What is acknowledged as to man and his glory.

It is man's earthly state that is here in hand, with whatever in it seems to indicate honour and success. No doubt it is man fallen of whom this is said; he withers and fails, as he is, and because he is, fallen. Nevertheless, to avoid embarrassment, it may be as well to admit that this world of ours seems to be ordered as a scene of mutability, and that man's state was always, in any view of it, harmonised, on some principle, to that condition of the world he lived in. What precise changes were brought about in his condition when he fell cannot, all of them, be particularly assigned; but this we believe, that whatever elements of the changeable and transient might be in his earthly lot, man, unfallen, would have developed an element of durable, progressive, and victorious life, only the more triumphant for any circumstances of outward change through

which it made good its persistent progress. But man, fallen, became wholly subject to vanity, as grass that withers and fades.

There are forms of plant life which last so long that they impress us with a sense of durable strength, because our own life is too short to enable us to survey easily the beginning and the end of theirs. There are trees that see successive generations of men rise and fall, while their life unfolds itself through summer air and winter winds. These are not our types. No, but those plants whose swift passage through their life, and passing away from it, is matter of daily notice. So are we in the flesh—we whose precarious and changeful state, and swift accomplishment, is a daily experience, and a matter of recurrent observation.

There is not one of these short-lived plants but has in it the mystery of life. No familiarity should blind us to the wonder of that perpetual miracle. There is the strange rush of life by which the seed hastens to transform itself into that which shall be; there is the beauty of the young plant, so tender, so bright, so exquisite in shaping and tint—its beauty and its promise also, —for that which has already proved able to grow to so much, why should it not indefinitely and

endlessly grow on? There is power here—about the opening of the flower,—why should it ever fail if it was to be at all? The roots have power to draw upon the soil for endless stores. The wonderful processes within have power to turn these into the nourishment of life, into fresh organs, and storehouses, and manufactories of life. The leaves have power to make sun and air the ministers, to perfect the health and grace of all. Why might not the plant go on indefinitely to stronger, and more graceful, and more wonderful forms of prosperous life? But a day soon comes when the process of change begins to tend downwards again; the life fails, the plant withers, all will soon be over.

So with man. In him, beyond all power and promise that are common to vegetable and animal life, a new unfolding of capacity and aspiration seems to point onwards and upwards endlessly. Many a disaster and disgrace environ human nature, in its actual conditions, as it exists in the various races of men. Yet, amid all, the wonder and the glory of spiritual existence and spiritual capacity assert themselves. Man rises into being, able to survey the universe; and going beyond what he surveys, he holds converse with truth, and law, and God. For a while it is so, and

under strange conditions. Then he fades and sinks—a little longer-lived than grass, yet accomplishing the same cycle.

The *glory* of man is as the flower of the field: the flower falleth away. For man feels that "undoubtedly he was fashioned to much honour"; and some men intensely feel it. He was fashioned, not merely to fulfil some prescribed process, but to seek that which shall be counted for a virtue and a praise, and so achieve honour, and win his crown. In many forms men do it; and whatever the moralist or the religious man may have to say, when all is weighed, of the ends for which, and the principles on which, it is done, surely a signal and splendid manifestation of man's capacities has broken into view along this line of things. How have men striven and conquered—how have they trampled down the tyranny of circumstances—how have they bent and moulded their own nature—how have they inspired their fellows, and made territories and ages pervious to the influences which they set in motion! And all this glorious capacity and energy, which crowns man and adorns him, can endure only for its little while; then it fades and falls away. So the plant reaches its glory in the flower—a miracle of design, exquisite in the perfect grace with which

it crowns the life from which it springs, but short-lived and fading. One after another the sons of glory arrest the admiration of the world ; and even while we gaze the oracle is fulfilled. His breath departs, he returns to his earth ; in that day his thoughts perish.

This principle of mutation and decay takes visible effect, not merely in the case of those who have not a hope beyond the earth, but in the case also of those who have. Indeed, in their case the exemplification may be said to be in some degree more signal and conspicuous, because we associate them with an enduring life and with an immortal destiny ; and yet we see their life and them die down before our eyes. Not that their inner life is a vain pretence ; but here, on the earth, it must embody itself in fleshly and earthly forms of effort. These, for the time, serve the purposes of the everlasting kingdom ; they carry forward its history in the man himself, and in the world at large ; they hand on the torch of life from year to year, and from age to age. But the man himself—yes, and the efforts, in their earthly and fleshly forms, in which so precious and mighty a life embodied itself,—these decay and grow feeble ; they die, and pass away. What endures may be plain to faith, but it is not obvious to sense.

Here, as everywhere in the world, the law obtains —the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth. About the germ of spiritual life, and animated by its virtue, are collected a congeries of earthly faculty, and earthly material, and earthly enterprise, yes, and earthly glory. All these fade. Meanwhile, in all this there is, no doubt, something that endures. All work wrought in God, all honour that comes from Him, must endure. But it is in another climate it must reappear; here it seems to vanish.

II. The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

What is it that is set against the withering grass and the fading flower, for permanence? Is it ancient oaks and cedars? Is it everlasting mountains and enduring hills? Is it the unchangeable innumerable stars, which earthly forces cannot reach nor touch? What deep-founded, wide-spreading mass of material strength shall it be? It is a Word—the Word of the Lord. What so impalpable—unseen, unfelt, something that trembles only on the air! Yet here the seat of immutability is found. This endures.

The believers of old were no materialists. It was not that they failed to realise in their own way, amid all the decay and change of which the

world is full, principles of persistency, aspects of the world that impressed the mind with the sense of ancient and unchanging order, of mere duration. Yet they found the true root of all in God. He was from everlasting to everlasting. From Him came the being of this material world. By the Word of the Lord and by the breath of His mouth, it was made. From Him it derived whatever impressive instances of unchanging order it contains. "Thy word is settled in heaven. Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances; for all are thy servants." On Him depended also the flux and reflux of the changes, the growth and the decay. "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth." Everywhere, through the earth's sameness and its changes, yes, and through its darkest mysteries and perplexities, faith discerned the influence of the supreme controlling will. "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."

But there is something much more special in the text. For the Word of the Lord not only fulfils itself through all the world; it comes to

men. It came, it comes to man, the spiritual and immortal being, to be entertained and to take effect, in a way more glorious than that in which it has place among stars and trees, and animals. And it comes even to man rebellious and fallen, bearing to him a wonderful meaning and purpose, disclosing and accomplishing a wonderful hope. This is in view when it is said that the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

The Word of the Lord,—it is the forthgoing and embodiment of His purpose, shaped into promise. But how sure and steadfast is His purpose. "The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations."

The Word of the Lord,—it is the assertion of His authority. But how supremely sovereign that authority, and how supremely blessed and good. Truly "His commandment is life everlasting."

The Word of the Lord,—it is the utterance of His mercy and His faithfulness. But how sure are His mercies, and how steadfast His faithfulness. Mercy built up for ever: faithfulness established in the very heavens.

The Word of the Lord,—it carries the assurance of His will. But that is the effectual almighty will which worketh all in all.

Now, the Word of the Lord sent to men,

unfolding from age to age, proved more and more to be the Word of Salvation—declaring salvation, working it, communicating it, nourishing it. It proved more and more to be the Word of Life, even of life eternal. To sum it all up, what did it prove to be, but Christ Jesus come in the flesh? "The Word was made flesh." Christ come—dying, risen and ascended, believed on; Christ in us the hope of glory; here is that mind of God which His Word embodies and unfolds.

This Word, then, comes. It comes as truth to be believed. And when it is believed, then the thoughts of God, through His Word, become mine. They shine in me and round me as the light of my heart and the light of my way. I have the light of life.

And it comes as promise,—promise of peace and of strength, to be embraced; and when it is embraced, I become partaker of benefits, in which stands what God calls life.

And it comes as direction and commandment, to be followed and complied with; and when it is followed and complied with, then my course proceeds in an inward harmony with God, and in an experience of the blessedness of well-doing.

In all which aspects it proves to be enduring; for the truth which it discloses proves to be a per-

manent light. No new discoveries will disgrace it or efface it. It is the truth that shall abide with us for ever. And the good which it promises is that solid good which is an eternal inheritance; and the promise pledges it to be for ever. And the ways into which it leads are ways, walking in which the soul grows ever into the likeness, and into the fellowship of God. He that doeth His will, abideth for ever.

But more has to be said. I have been speaking of the Word of the Lord as it offers itself to be entertained, as it comes knocking at the door of mind and heart. But the Word of the Lord goes forth also, as the life-giving creative Word. God is speaking what the Bible sounds in your ears. Is He not speaking when He makes the power of it experimental, effectual, triumphant in your heart? Even as at first in creation, the Word said, Let light be, and light was; so in salvation it comes with a secret effectual power, accomplishing God's will. God who commanded the light to shine . . . shines in the heart. And what a power this is—how mighty, how patient, how effectual, how able to overcome obstacles, to accomplish all unlikelihoods! And how does this reveal God and bring us near to God! For the power that works thus within us, is the effectual

manifestation of love—the love which pities, and spares, and effectually saves the lost; and in this love is God most of all made known, for God is love. This shall prove durable. It endures for ever.

Now, when it is said, "The word of the Lord endureth for ever," this is meant, that the Word of the Lord, as we have considered it, becomes the principle of a new, real, victorious life, in the fading sons of men. Through this they rise above the necessities of a changing, decaying, defeated life, and become partakers of a sure hope of life eternal.

The Word of God, by which the heavens and earth were made, retains all its permanent and steadfast efficacy when the heavens and earth flee away, being by the same Word kept in store for that destiny. But that might be nothing to us. Here is the point—that this Word is become, in Christ, a foundation for us to stand on, a light for us to see by, a life for us to breathe and drink into, a treasure for us to possess, a strength for us to triumph in, durable and eternal.

Therefore, in the context, verse 23, it is said, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." As if into the withering grass,

or fading flower, some new and mighty principle of life, strange to this mutable world, were infused; so that, by a new development out of the midst of that which decayed and fell away, there should bloom up some form of heavenly virtue which could not die, which no frosts could blight, no scorching suns parch and wither, no length of time cause to fade. If this were so in a flower, we might admire it, yet we should feel it incongruous. Nay, that steadfast continuance of a thing which has no reason for continuance, might rather weary and offend the mind. But for man it is not incongruous, if Wisdom and Mercy pave the way for it, that he should find, at length, immortal hopes, and rest himself in the bosom of an unchanging Saviour, and look up assured that nothing shall separate him from the love of Christ. And so when the Word of God makes effectual entrance and takes possession of the heart, in that very process a new birth is effected, and a new life comes into experience, durable as the seed from which it springs. True, the whole manner of man's life in a fallen world is such, that *it* must pass away. To observation and experience the flower must still decay. But faith is assured that God's Word holds, and that the unseen things, in which faith's main portion lies, are eternal.

So again, presently, we find the Apostle exhorting the believers to nourish themselves with the Word. "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." As if the fading flower, vivified with a new life, should have its roots supplied with a new set of juices, which, as they thirstily drank them in, should diffuse health and vigour through every branch and leaf. Just so it is the calling of the believer to drink deeper into that Word which makes him partaker of new life and immortal hopes. And as he does so, he is to think that this is an exercise different far from all the ordinary efforts and satisfactions of mere earthly life. These are short-lived in their nature and their scope, proportioned to the brief life of a flower that fades and ends. But this looks forward to eternity. It is the nourishment and unfolding of a life that endures. He that drinks of those fountains shall thirst again; but he that "drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst."

Yes, my brethren, this is the lesson, when we see how decay is written on the state of man, how the earthly forms and embodiments even of the true and good, which we have known and valued, wither like the grass, and vanish from our sight.

It is not to resign ourselves to a pensive acquiescence in our inevitable vanity. It is not to console ourselves with a vague general doctrine of immortality. It is to hearken to the mighty Word of God. Is there rising in us a life which that Word quickened and sustains—a life of dependence on Christ and adherence to Him? Does it show itself, in enduring the trial of faith, in loving One whom we have not seen, in contemplating and embracing the salvation of the soul? Does it go forth in watchfulness, and sobriety, and hope, and obedience? Is it exercised in holiness in all manner of conversation, and in childlike fear, and in purifying of the heart, and in unfeigned love of the brethren? Are we so persuaded of its existence, that when conscious that it is feeble or dubious in us, we betake us to the Word of the Lord, to drink into its spirit, and pray for the influences which it holds forth, and which come breathing with its message?

Some of us, who are older, feel, in different degrees, how life hastens. The stream runs quicker as it nears the final leap. The touches of the finger of decay are here and there on leaf and petal, and we feel how short the story of life has been. How precious should Christ be! How wonderful and how good should forgiveness and

grace appear! How the interests of the new life, which alone endures, should grow and gain upon us! How should the Word be opening to us its meaning, and the great prospects before us be attracting heart and eye! How gladly should we think of the wonderful mercy that links sinners to the risen Saviour in an everlasting covenant ordered and sure! How unworthy of us, ah! and how ruinous for us, if the vain conversation, received by tradition from our fathers, is only retaining or increasing its influence on our lives!

And some of us are younger, to whom, as yet, the experience of fading is not so present, however many instances they have seen, and to whom, naturally, life, if drawn out to the ordinary span, seems somewhat long and roomy. How well for you if the Word has taught you its lessons, and made you feel that life here, long or short, has nothing, and can have nothing, to compare with Christ, and salvation in Him. If so, stir yourselves up to moral thoughtfulness. It is the want of this that often makes unprosperous Christians. Make a thoughtful estimate of your true calling. Cherish the life that springs from the incorruptible seed. Nourish it with the sincere milk of the Word. Bring forth the fruits of it.

Let this be testified to all. The human life of

each of you, needs a new life in the heart of it. Without that, it will soon wither away: it will end in mere confusion and disgrace. But you may have a life strong and immortal as the Word of the Lord itself. So great a life is, in this Word, knocking at your ears and hearts.

You can all imagine how your late pastor would have handled a theme like that on which we have been dwelling. He would have set the truth in the heart of a hundred suggestions of natural beauty. He would have made the text sparkle with fresh light on all its sides, and rendered it fragrant with a thousand graceful and touching associations. But we shall hear him so descant no more. He is himself become the illustration of that which he could so well illustrate. The flower has faded away. The grace of the fashion of it is perished. But the Word of the Lord endures. It endures for us. It endures also, as our sure hope is, in him who believed and loved it, and lived in the power of it, and preached it from a full heart. The perpetuity and victory of the Word of the Lord has place, we doubt not, in our departed friend. And though the darkness and disgrace of the grave have closed over his remains, according to the common case of men (in which Christ also shared), yet we rejoice to

think that he is with Christ, and that he shall stand in his lot at the end of the days.

In thinking of his peculiar gifts and his special influence, one reverts, perhaps, first of all, to his love of nature, his interest in God's works, as such, whether men or things, and his delight in all their aspects. This he had in common with many; but he had more. He not only had the sense alive to the beauty and order of creation, but the poetic instinct to divine its pregnancy, as mirroring the truths and lessons that environ the highest relations of man; and he had the gift of uttering what he saw in apt and glowing words, that made his hearers partakers in his own vision. Which of you does not recall this in a thousand instances? The text itself reminds you how much he saw in plants—what lessons of life and death, of growth and decay, of nurture, of grafting, of fruitfulness. The eloquent stars spoke new lessons to you through his interpretation. The sea suggested to you how the unseen celestial attractions persuade the tides to spread gladly over the unseemly places of the desert shore. The clouds taught you how that which lay once in the most sunken and polluted places, base and low, is raised by sunny influences into light and glory, and heaven. No quarter to which you turn but offers monitors

and exemplars which were made vocal for you by him whose voice is now silenced. He brought this gift almost wholly to bear on the preaching of the Gospel, either from the pulpit or through the press. On that Gospel his own hopes were built, and to its ministry, in early life, at a time of great revival of religion in Scotland, he had dedicated himself. Shall it be held unnecessary to dwell here on the importance of the gain which accrues to preaching, when remarkable imaginative and illustrative powers are wisely applied in the service? To some it may be needless. But others look on this faculty as only adding a pleasant ornament of an external kind, fitted at best to attract those who are not yet susceptible of more spiritual attraction. If any think so, their mistake is of the greatest. There is no higher kind of ministry than that in which sound and wise thoughts, and living Scriptural experience, flow naturally in moulds supplied by an imagination that is both just and glowing. Truth surprises the hearer with fresh glimpses of its meaning and new suggestions of its application—its sense is realised, and its grasp felt through avenues of the mind unassailed before; and you find the Gospel looking out on you from objects and from influences that had been before insig-

nificant, if not secular and pagan in their associations. All the more is this to be said, because one must freely confess the inefficiency of mere artificial adornments, and the objectionableness of them when the parade of eloquence or ingenuity becomes the chief object in view.

When I commemorate this power of his, I do not forget others, of themselves sufficient to have made him an eminent and influential man. As you might expect of one who was from the first a successful student, he brought to the service excellent acquirements of every kind; he brought also a vigorous understanding, and a most attractive character. With all, there was a certain indescribable originality, in virtue of which whatever he said and did was his own, and not another man's. But that to which he brought these gifts was the Gospel of Christ. He did not veil the plain realities of that Gospel in æsthetic or in philosophic vapour. His statements of it were ever clear, simple, and consistent, and his pleading for it direct and earnest. The ruin by the Fall, the redemption by the blood of Christ, the regeneration by the Holy Ghost, the simplicity of faith, and the instant bestowment of blessing on faith were prominent topics unreservedly expounded. And surely the realisation of our

blessed Lord's Person as the fountain of blessing, had a large place in his mind. The touch of the trembling sinner's faith at the hem of the garment here on earth, felt and responded to by the living Lord in heaven, was a thought of which he was never weary. If I should forget to say how aptly he brought out Christian duty and Christian privilege, his published works would bear witness in my room.

His was a cheerful religion, and his was hopeful preaching. He did not deny, he did not disguise, the terrors of the Lord. He did not shut his eyes to the depths of obstinacy and evil in human hearts; but he believed in glad tidings which are to all people. His mind was drawn especially to cheering and hopeful views, and what is encouraging in the Gospel was his especial theme. Perhaps it was from this, along with the imaginative power of his preaching, that he was so useful to young men, as from the beginning of his Glasgow ministry he unquestionably was. And his influence among them was reinforced by the manliness and healthfulness of his own character —genial and fearless, and, as commonly happens with truly original men, retaining to the last an unmistakable element of the childlike. This formed much of the strength of the position from

which he worked. It constituted much of the influence that was felt in connection with the very recollection of his face or name. If it be hard to say how much power accrued to his preaching from the peculiar genius which inspired it, it is hard to reckon how much was added to his influence by the perception diffused, wherever he came, of a manly and cheerful religious life. With this, too, I may connect the sense he had of God's goodness to him in providence, all along the course of his history. No one could hear him, or read his writings much, without perceiving it. There are some whom God prepares for usefulness by scathing trials and by great inward convulsions, that leave the spirit tremulous and quivering ever after. But there are some whom He prepares for use by what I may call much considerate indulgence. He teaches them, indeed, their sin and danger, awakes them to the true perception of human need, and of the pity that saves. He chastens them with faithful care, teaching them to sympathise with human sorrow, and to grieve for human sin. Yet, on the whole, He makes the course of their life remarkable for mercies granted and deliverances vouchsafed. It is not always thus that God makes sunny Christians; some of the brightest come out of strange afflictions. But some have their char-

acter and lot tempered in the way that I describe. And it has the effect of sending through their lives the strain of a thanksgiving psalm, making their existence, as they go to and fro, a testimony that the sun is shining. I suppose our departed friend had, in the measure he required, seasons of struggle, trial, pain. But I rather think he would have ranked himself, on the whole, among those whom goodness and mercy had followed in a notable degree. And where he came men commonly felt that here was one who served the Lord with gladness and joyfulness of heart.

Genial as he was, he was a man of thoroughly independent character, resolute in his convictions, and outspoken in the utterance of them. What seemed to him wrong he was prompt to oppose; and of all wrongs, I rather think wrongs sanctioned by conventional notions, and which men therefore passed unnoticed, generally roused him most. He never was afraid to take up a side because it was unpopular, or because it had become involved in odium through bitter discussions. At the same time, in such a case, he brought into the discussion his own cordial and cheerful spirit, and did much to assuage bitterness, by showing none himself. But though never bitter, he could add great force

to the clearing of truth by debate. Claptrap of all kinds was in danger from him. And when voluble and pretentious persons took very high ground, it was something to see how with equal ease and dexterity he could pierce the windbag, and exhibit the collapse that followed.

It has been a great privilege to enjoy such a ministry as his—public and private, reinforced as it has been all along by the clear sincerity and unaffected earnestness of the man. How distinctly the type of it stands out, to the mind's eye, as bearing a stamp all his own! The place we mourn to-day, as made vacant by his death, was his own place, which he had made for himself, and which no other will fill. How long and cordially will his work and he be remembered! How distinctly one foresees, long years after this, in one company and another, the loving relaxation of the features, and the kindly tones of the voice, when men recall the name and speak of the ministry of WILLIAM ARNOT! Well, it yields us the old lesson in a new and forcible instance. Unless his work was wrought in God, how vain it had all been. Unless his hope stood fast in Christ, how vain it had been to rehearse his qualities now. Be ye also ready. Remember those who have been over you, who have spoken to you the Word of the Lord,

whose faith follow. Let the vessel of your life fill continually with that Word of the Lord, believed, lived, done. Let that be the meaning of your life —that its explanation. For the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth; but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.

XVI

CHRIST'S DEATH FOR SIN

"Christ died for our sins."—1 Cor. xv. 3.

THE interposition of the Son of God into this world combines many rays of light, many forms of healing influence—some of which, most likely, we shall never be able adequately to distinguish or to understand in this world. So also His death in particular may, in various ways, reveal its fitness to promote man's salvation. None of these should be denied, none undervalued. The Socinian view is true, that this memorable close of our Lord's earthly ministry attested His sincerity — He sealed His testimony with His blood,— and at the same time His martyr death impresses on our minds, with great force, the duty of holding at all cost to the path of righteousness; further, taken along with the resurrection, the

same death assures us of the immortal victory which awaits perseverance in that path, and it confirms us in the faith of our Lord's ability to fulfil all His promises. All this is true. Any help that arises to men in the light of such contemplations is validly grounded in the facts. Again, it is true that our Lord's sufferings and death, however they may be accounted for, appeal to human minds with singular force as a demonstration of pure self-forgetting love; and they afford, at the same time, a sorrowful demonstration of the evil and baseness of sin. No doubt, as regards the validity and the permanence of such impressions, something depends on the design that is ascribed, or is not ascribed to that sacrifice. Yet if these impressions arise in minds that never see their way to look farther into the grounds and ends of our Lord's death, they are, surely, good. Again, if any one makes much of this, that our Lord's whole life had its fitness and worth as a Saviour's life, by reason of its perfect obedience, its holy beauty and completeness; that it behoved the Saviour of men to commend Himself to God, and to grace His whole function and service, by perfect goodness in all its kinds; and that in His suffering and death, this fragrance of our Lord's character and work becomes consummate, this

goodness reaches its last expression towards God and man; and the life so crowned and perfected stands before us for ever as that with which the Father is well pleased—surely this also is true, and may well take its great place in the thoughts we cherish of our Saviour and His work. We dispute none of these things, but assume and take thankful possession of them all. Neither is there any question about this, that the Redeemer Himself, with all His excellences of every kind, and His work and service with every form of efficacy that can Scripturally be assigned to it—that all this is the gift of the Father; it is the expression of the Father's loving will to seek and save that which was lost. God so loved the world that He thus "gave his only begotten Son."

All these things, then, we admit and assume, when we go on to ask, What, however, is the chief thought that Scripture leads us to entertain, in connection with such a statement as that in the text—a specimen of many—that "Christ died for our sins"?

Let me commence with saying something about sin. There are various points of view, all valid, in which this sorrowful fact in human history may be regarded. Sin is the preference of the lower to the higher; sin is accepted disorder and dis-

grace in the inner kingdom of our own soul; sin is variation from the dictate of duty, disregard of the imperative claim which that makes within the man; sin is apostasy from God, rebellion against Him, insubordination to His known will; sin becomes a principle of evil, a habit of evil, threatens to be a destiny of evil. Then there are many forcible metaphors which express its nature and working, more forcibly than any formal definition, and which I need not rehearse. The point on which I wish to dwell for a moment, is the way in which sin is connected with its consequences to the sinner.

We have experience in this world of the way in which things are chained together; and some of these experiences are unwelcome and painful. Now these arise to us in various ways. Sometimes they come as experiences that were for us simply inevitable. Absolutely they could not be helped. Sometimes they come as the result of our mistakes, those mistakes which relatively deserve to be called innocent. Trying to take our course, we miss our course, and find ourselves involved in some trouble. Wishing to go to a given place we mistake the road, and have additional trouble and toil entailed on us in consequence before we can arrive. We are in that

case conscious of error, and we reckon on it that error will bring trouble after it; but in such cases it is innocent error, except in so far as we may have reason to think that by greater care it might have been avoided. Once the error is committed, the natural consequences may be inevitable. We regret them, and we realise feelingly the limits of our wisdom and strength. But conscience does not utter in our hearts her sentence, nor inflict her peculiar sting.

Now sin has its consequences; and as sin also is error (though not as other errors), some, at all events, of those consequences follow in the same natural way with those already referred to. But the peculiarity of sin is, that it carries with it the sense of ill desert. It deserves to be judged and condemned, and to have that condemnation *expressed.* Something is due to it; and the consequences, whether all of them follow in a natural train or not, acquire the character of punishment.[1]

Men feel they have a right to render a condemning judgment on sin, when they come to know about it. And, however it may be for a time

[1] Indeed there is such a thing as successful sinning, and a man by sinning may purchase to himself substantial enjoyments. But the faith of a Christian—and indeed the faith of honest men that are not Christians—is that sin ought not to succeed, and in the end cannot.

outwardly with the sinner, however it may be with him as to the solace of his senses, condemning judgment is rendered against him in his own heart, and the feeling can at any time be awakened there that he has purchased evil to himself; that it ought to be ill with the sinner, the reward of his work being rendered to him.

More particularly, looking to that element in the case which to the natural man is often the least palpable, but which Scripture especially sets in light and enforces—looking to the sinner as one set in relation with God, the effect of sin is always to create distance, and to hinder communion between God and His creature. In this time of forbearance,—while things are not yet allowed to come to their full result and to a final reckoning,—this effect of sin may be greatly modified by God's patient goodness, as He leads us to repentance. But it always is so far present as to point towards the ultimate doom which sin incurs and deserves, and which, unless salvation intervene, it receives; which is, separation from God's goodness and subjection to His just displeasure. "Surely thou wilt judge the wicked, O God." Sin which appeals to my own conscience and to the consciences of my fellow-men for condemnation, appeals also to

God for sentence and for punishment. What that ought to be, I do not here inquire. Scripture speaks of it, Christ speaks of it in solemn terms.

Now, what I point out to you is this; the fact that sin demands its consequences in the peculiar form of deserving them as something due, that sin ought to be dealt with according to its demerit, must have its ground in the nature of God Himself. We are to be on our guard indeed, in carrying consequences from the constitution of the world up to God. We are very subject to err when we try it. But nothing in the constitution of the world is a more authentic witness to God than conscience. And Scripture surely confirms what conscience suggests. It is an element of the divine and eternal excellence, according to the Scripture, that determines this order in human things, viz. that sin should be treated with the solemn and effectual disapproval and condemnation which is expressed in punishment. I say expressed. This whole history of ours is a history in which God on His part, and man on his part, *express* themselves, historically—express themselves, the one to the other. And what I fix your mind upon is this, that it is an excellence and glory of God's nature, in virtue of

which sin is punishable, proper and fit to be dealt with in that way.

True, most true; oh how gladly do we rehearse it and bring it to the front! God is one who is found, not only dealing with long forbearance with sinful men, but also in His grace making for them an end of sins and of all their doleful consequences. "Who is a God like to thee that pardonest iniquity, and passest by the transgression of the remnant of thine heritage, because thou delightest in mercy?" He bestows repentance and forgiveness. But then the question is whether He is represented as doing so, as if it were a light thing, of no difficulty at all, that He should do this. Is it not rather true, that whatever the explanation may be, this at all events can be said, that in doing this great thing God keeps full in view what belongs to His own character in this respect, and keeps full in view the emphatic obligation according to which sin and judgment should be bound together? It is as something wonderful, that forgiveness, in its divine completeness and grace, is announced.

And so also with men in their degree, in their faint and shadowy way. I ask you this, whether the return of true goodness in the case of a sinful man is marked by this, that he counts it easy to

forgive himself, or rather finds it harder? I ask you whether such return of true goodness makes him feel it a light thing, a natural, obvious, easy thing that God should forgive him, or a thing astonishing and wonderful? I ask you whether it does not belong to true repentance, that a man should seriously feel and own how fit it were that the reward of his doings should be rendered to him? Ought such a man to reject or to accept the sentence on his sins? When God would describe to His ancient people the state of mind which might betoken a true return to God, after judgment should have overtaken them for sin, He does it in this way: "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity—I will remember the land." A serious and express recognition and acceptance of this great principle belongs, as it would appear, to the very nature of true repentance, of a real agreement with God, and an actual return to Him.

And so we may be assured that when the Mediator, the Redeemer, in whom God and man meet and are at one, interposed in this great cause, and took on His own soul the burdens it involved—we may be assured that He was minded to have full regard, the most loving

and loyal, to what belongs to this part of the divine character, what pertained to this element in the sinner's case. We may be assured He did not come as one who would proceed on the footing that it is a light thing to forgive and pass by sins. He came with ample love, pity, compassion; He came with ample power to enlighten, persuade, attract; He came full of virtue to reveal, vivify, reunite; but as He hid nothing from Himself—as He based His achievement on nothing false, nothing misrepresented—we may be assured that He came as one who confronted, and who did right in some form to this great fact in man's state, the desert of sin, and to this great element in God's character and government, that He will express in act His mind concerning sin.

Very well; but now, perhaps, Christ's death has nothing particular to do with this. Perhaps it stands in no relation to necessities created by this element in the case, or arising out of it. Perhaps there was no need that either in this way of Christ's death, or in any other very express or determinate way, provision should be made, in the course of God's dealings with man and sin, for anything arising out of the desert of sins.

Perhaps, for example, it may be enough to deal with it verbally. As it seems to be enough that men repenting and returning should expressly own that indeed they deserve to be dealt with otherwise than in a way of grace and mercy; so perhaps God may be thought to do enough when He assures us that we might be dealt with according to our sins: and Christ as mediator also, may be thought to do enough when He certifies us, that we do not deserve the benefits He bestows, but far otherwise. Perhaps it is enough for God, and Christ, and us, to salute our deservings with that serious recognition, and so take leave of them. Perhaps, therefore, Christ's death must be otherwise explained and considered —*e.g.*, as an impressive incident in a life of humiliation, completing the impression which His whole life makes of a serious purpose to do us good, which kept its road through all that might befall. Let us see whether our text implies no more; only while I speak of the Lord's suffering and death, as my theme requires, do not let it be thought that I forget, or would conceal, the divine wealth of blessing disclosed in the Incarnation, and in the life and works of Christ before He died; or that I forget that the death itself, whatever it was fitted to achieve, could be valuable

and significant, only because it was the death of such a Person, and because He made His way to it through such a life of perfect goodness and persistent sacrifice.

Now, then, I suppose it will not be denied that Scripture commonly refers to our Lord's death, not merely as a remarkable experience that befell Him while He was prosecuting His benevolent designs on our behalf, and holding communion with us in various forms,—not merely so; but it is referred to as something which operated powerfully, by some virtue or fitness which it had, upon the work of our redemption; and was intended so to do. He secured and achieved our redemption by dying for us. He gave Himself (as the Apostle Paul says) for me; He gave His flesh for the life of the world; He laid down His life for the sheep. Then, still further, His death was "for our sins": the text says so, putting this as the first commonplace of Christian doctrine. It was "for us" because it was "for our sins." He gave Himself for our sins; He was delivered for our offences. Moreover, I think it will hardly be said that He is represented as dying for our sins, only as He might perhaps be said to work miracles for our sins, or to deliver teaching for our sins, *i.e.* because death and

miracles and teaching, all alike, were parts of a history that fitted well to the mission of one who came to save His people from their sins. Candid men will not deny that, in the large class of passages bearing on the point, a far more specific relation of Christ's death to our sins is implied, a far more direct efficiency of the one upon the ill estate created for us by the other. But this teaching may be interpreted perhaps as asserting a special virtue and adaptation in Christ's death, to dissociate and separate us from sins, so that we might live clear of them; to break the spell of sin over us; to come powerfully in between us and sinful practices or affections; to cleanse and raise our lives; and so His death might be "for our sins" that way. And indeed I think that Christ's redemption is most mighty to set us free from sin's power and dominion, and is continually preached to us, with that especial commendation, in the New Testament. But if it is maintained that this is the leading thought, when it is said that Christ died for our sins, I will remind you that Christ in His dying is represented as dealing with sin considered as sin past, which had left behind it ill desert. For it is in this character that sin needs forgiveness; and you know how the death of

Christ for sins is connected with the forgiveness of sins—we have "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." As if to put it out of all doubt, the Apostle emphasises it where he says that "Christ is set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, for the remission of sins that are past." I am not, I repeat, shutting out other ways, whatever ways can be assigned, in which Christ's sacrifice may bear on our deliverance from sin; but I am reminding you of the frequency and distinctness and prominence of this mode of reference in the New Testament, to the bearing of Christ's death upon sins, considered as past, entailing ill-desert, awaiting judgment, needing forgiveness. All this was quite familiar to the New Testament writers, as it was based directly on the Old Testament discipline about transgression and forgiveness. It was not to them something artificial and far fetched, requiring to be apologised for and explained away; it is continually referred to with perfect ease, as something only requiring to be asserted, exhibited and believed.

The only question now that seems to remain is this; with what kind of efficiency, through what kind of adaptation and influence, could our Lord's sacrifice and death bear on sins so—to bring in

forgiveness and remission? I think the passages already quoted bear very clearly on this. But now I will remind you that from the midst of those references and allusions certain passages of Apostolic teaching rise, as it were, into view, that seem to settle unmistakably the principle on which it should be thought that our Lord's death was so availing to take away sin. The passages I speak of now arise, so to say, out of the ranks of those formerly referred to, with perfect consistency and perfect ease. And I will read some of them to you. Rom. iii. 24-26: "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." 2 Cor. v. 19-21: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might

be made the righteousness of God in him." Gal. iii. 13, 14: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Christ who is said (Heb. x. 12) to have "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever," is said (Heb. ix. 28) to have been, "once offered to bear the sins of many." 1 Pet. ii. 24: "Christ his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed." Now I ask you whether the impression which these passages make is really doubtful? Do they not teach that as regards this aspect of our case, Christ brought our deliverance to pass by doing right to the principles which connect sin with judgment; and that He did right to these by bowing Himself to sorrow and death on our behalf. Now when they so teach, the Apostles are only putting in evidence and exhibiting in connection elements already present in the case, and supposed in those passages which in their terms may seem less precise. In the connection between sin and its deserved consequences we are compelled to recognise an order of forces

in the universe, which you may name in various ways; you may trace them to principles in various lines; but at all events they have a judicial character, they operate in a judicial manner. The assertion which we base on the whole New Testament teaching on this head is that our Lord, in His sacrifice and death, dealt with this fact in our condition as sinners. How did He deal with it? Not by annulling the order of forces referred to, the judicial element in the case; not by subverting it; not by denying or disregarding it; but, in some sublime and wonderful way, by giving effect to it, by doing right to it, in becoming a sufferer in our place. This was done according to some worthy rule, some standard applicable to so great a matter.

It is always to be acknowledged with the deepest thankfulness and gladness that this mystery of grace is far too great to be explained in all its parts, so that no mystery should remain. If that were to be done, every step and element of the process would have to be reduced to some analogy, drawn from human experience and sanctioned by general human consent. That cannot be done. The case is sublimely and divinely singular. If it is asked, How could one interpose and achieve an adjustment for many on such lines,

we can only point to regions of truth where we suppose that the answer to such questions may lie. We point to our Lord's divine person; we point to His relations to the law as its author, as well as its fulfiller; we point to His relation to the human race; we point to that singular union of all the saved to Himself as their Lord and Head, of the true nature and effect of which we know so little, while we reap so much. But while we point to these, we are not careful to work out explanations; we are content to be so far made aware of the task set for our Captain of Salvation, which in this point was fixed by the conditions in which He found us—the law violated by our sin, the supreme government wronged by our rebellion, desert claiming its due; we are content to be made aware of the method in which He dealt with it—which was not to overbear or compromise those elements of the case, but to do right to them; we are content to be made aware of the means by which he did it, namely, submission and sacrifice, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. We gladly own that a mystery cleaves for us to the task undertaken; we cannot determine how that great task took shape as it offered itself to our Lord; a mystery cleaves for us to the method and the means, for we can give no final and com-

plete account of how His submission and suffering availed to set us right in reference to those elements of our state as sinners. But yet we have enough; we have the links, needed, in order that the mystery, ever felt where God is present, may lay effective hold on our mind and heart and history. We perceive an experimental want supplied, a great principle of right upheld, a special tie between the Lord and men established. It should be no wonder to Christians to find their Lord coming nearer to them, identifying Himself more fully with them, undertaking more on their behalf than they are able fully to explain.

As we look back to the beginnings of the long history of the ways of God with sinners, we see a patient, long-suffering, a rich and various grace, the workings of which we are far from having measured, coming into history,—as if, in spite of many warnings and many actual judgments, God would waive aside, or would forget what should ensue when sin and judgment meet. But we see also that there was in view, as by and by to come into the world and into history, an express recognition of this also. Only it was to come, not as exacted from men, but as supplied and borne by Him against whom the wrong was done.

To those who maintain that our Lord's death

was not an offering to God, but rather an impressive and instructive demonstration to man, we say that because indeed it was an offering to God, it becomes far more effectually and completely a revelation and demonstration for us. And there are two points that may here be emphasised, as bearing on our instruction and our experience.

In the first place, this position tends to maintain in our minds a due sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the divine wonderfulness of God's complete and eternal forgiveness. If forgiveness were lavished on sinful creatures, on the principle that no difficulty exists but our own unreadiness to receive it, the conviction of that ill-desert of our sins, which surely is one leading factor in impressing us aright with sin's enormity, might fail to hold its due place in our minds. It may be said that forgiveness is granted in connection with repentance, and that is security enough. But repentance itself, to be real, should include the recognition of the tie that binds sin to punishment. Certainly in countless instances the loving recognition of the truth that He bore our sins, and that forgiveness comes to us allied with that great sacrifice, has been very effectual to beget and sustain in the hearts of believing men that sense of sin's wrong,

and of a wonderfulness in the forgiveness of it, without which forgiveness itself loses much of its value, its meaning, its due influence on the heart.

And so, in the second place, this faith sustains a due impression of the love of God in Christ towards sinners. A great evidence of grace and love, no doubt, shines before us in the incarnation and the gracious life of our Lord: what but love brought Him among us, or sped Him on that course of merciful works and words which filled His life? And so His dying, accepted as part of His experience here, is impressively gracious, even when it is not regarded as having a more special significance, and implying a heavier burden. But there is more than this in the way in which, in Scripture, the love is argued from the death. "He loved me and gave himself for me." "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." "Hereby perceive we the love, because he laid down his life for us." For it was His death that carried Him into the very heart of our burdens and disgrace, that out of the sacrifice might arise for us all kinds of deliverance and honour.

Perhaps I am speaking to some who are conscious, with reference to their own experience,

that what most strongly appeals to them, what they most sincerely and readily feel, is not so much the burden of guilt or need of forgiveness, but the practical question of how to get life purified, elevated, made true, Christlike, good. On this point I am to make no controversy with them. And they may be disposed to say, "Is it not so that in the New Testament the references to our Lord's death and redemption, even if they involve the facts and principles which you allege, yet constantly, almost without an exception, are turned so as to bear on practical consequences, in Christlike life, in deliverance from sin and attainments in holiness?" If this is said I heartily agree with it. I am quite sure that, according to the mind of the Apostles, Christ's redemption was meant to be always contemplated in that way of thankful personal appropriation, which carries us at once into the experience of believing life and believing attainment. I am sure also, that the bearing of Christ's redeeming death on the believer's state and prospects is far more various, according to the Scriptures, than we commonly apprehend; and that a power to be holy is grounded in it quite as much as a privilege to be forgiven.

But I would say this, to those whom I suppose to be now in view: If the point on which your

mind is specially awake and pressed with some sense of need, is that of dissatisfaction with your life, and longing, more or less, that it might be nearer the standard which the Scriptures disclose, it is well certainly to go to Christ with your case as you feel it, and with so much knowledge of it as He has taught you. Seek those gifts especially which have begun to seem valuable and indispensable. And yet remember this, that the grace you hope to meet and to receive, to enable you to put off sin, in its baseness and defilement, and to enable you to emerge into a truer life, is grace that comes in spite of ill-desert, in spite of provocations, in spite of long and various transgressions. Why do not those cut you off hopelessly? How can grace come at all but as forgiving grace? Do you think you are worthy of so great a gift as a true, effectual, victorious repentance? How can it come to you and grow and prosper, except as given by Him who pardons iniquity and transgression and sin? In Christ we do well to think we may find the very blessing we need, whatever it may be; but there is not a blessing of them all that has not forgiveness on the face of it and in the heart of it. And none of them would reach us unless forgiveness, as it were, did lead them by the hand.

Those who receive this doctrine as taught us in Scripture may well be impressed in a special manner with the sinfulness of their sin. For them that truth is embodied, for everlasting remembrance, in the history of Him whom they claim as their eternal Friend. They may well feel also, with a very special emphasis, the obligations under which they are laid. The debt they owe can never be repaid; it can never even be fathomed or understood. It is unspeakable. It remains only to say, "O Lord, I am thy servant; truly, I am thy servant; thou hast loosed my bonds."

XVII

THE WORLD AND ITS DESTINY

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."—1 JOHN ii. 17.

IN the context, verse 15, two influences are set against one another, the love of the world and the love of the Father. The Apostle treats them as opposites: between these principles he finds eternal war. There are men who are, characteristically, lovers of the world; and there are men who are, characteristically, lovers of the Father; and the two characters are opposed: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." In the text the Apostle emphasises the essential vanity of the one and the essential worth of the other: "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." He that loves the world shall pass with the world; he that loves the Father shall abide with the Father.

As the Apostle was, at this point, writing to young men, it was very fitting to remind them that the life lived here on earth is of quite incalculable importance in reference to all that is to follow. For *one* thing, the mould in which you are cast, the type to which you are conformed here, will be found to have momentous bearing on your state in future stages. It is *you*, observe, not some different being, emerging somehow from your ashes, who are to go forth into the Future. In this life, then, we are taking up the position about the great principles of God's kingdom, which we must occupy in that future state. We are writing now our book of Genesis.

If, then, in our present state of existence, there are two main courses on which we may fix, it is natural to ask, in the event of our fixing on either of them, what sort of preparation it will furnish for the following stages,—what it will leave us in hand, as it were, in that prospect. The text declares that as for the world and the lust of it, they pass away; but as for him that doeth the will of God, he abideth for ever.

First, let us try to fix the nature of the two alternatives here presented, the two diverging or opposing parties here contemplated; second, let us consider what is said about them.

First, then, on the one part the World and the Lust of it; on the other part, he that doeth the will of God.

1. The word *world*, in the use made of it in many places of Scripture, has a range of meaning not easy to bring out. The very word itself suggests that the thing intended by it displays great unity in great multiplicity; and we are very apt to be so lost in the vastness of it, as to fail to apprehend duly either its oneness or its manifoldness.

For, first of all, as used in texts like this, the word "world" includes every created thing which in this life comes under our view,—but all these under one specific consideration. It includes all these things, as they may be separated from God, by us who contemplate them and who deal with them. It is therefore the world of creatures as they are related to a perverse way of dealing with them. The creatures, as God's, are good, each in its degree, and they claim their place—their great place in human life. They make up the appointed scene of our existence: they are the materials of our exercise and training. To mark their beauty, their capabilities, their use, to have thought and purpose, interest and industry, drawn out in connection with them, that is appointed for us. But

all created things may come to be objects of contemplation or desire in a way that is ungodly —with a separation of them from God. Instead of being contemplated and used in their due relation to the nature and the will of God, they may be so wrenched into separation from Him as actually to be set over against Him as His rival, or as His substitute. As thus separated from Him they lay, as it were, the foundation of "this present evil world." All creatures with which men, departing from God, can any way have to do, may come within the compass of this "world" of the Apostle. So they are brought into captivity under sin; and, as Paul says, they "groan and travail in pain together until now."

Next, you must add to this the whole mass of sinful men, in their worldliness, worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator. Out of this present evil world we all need to be delivered, as it is said in the epistle to the Galatians; for we have all known how prone we are to desire and use the creatures of God in a way that is ungodly,—clinging to the creature and making it our idol,—denying or rejecting the Creator. Multitudes of men have acted so from end to end of their lives; masses of men have done it together, in all generations;—interweaving their

several contributions of worldliness into a vast homogeneous contexture or web of it. Hence have arisen traditions, habits, modes of thinking, forms of Society—the thousand ways for men to go in; the thousand moulds for men to take shape in; the thousand accredited precedents for men to follow at their ease—of the world, and away from God. Not that we forget the counter influence that is at work, reclaiming creation for God. Yet history is for the most part a history of worldliness. The structure of society at this day is largely based on the principle that worldliness must prevail. Masses of men as they rise up in successive generations, reinforce this cause with the strength of their human example, of their human sympathies; so that we are not to think of "the world" merely as a panorama of creature beauty and delight on which the eye that turns from God may rest: we must think of it also as a mighty tide, setting away from God, and claiming to draw all men and things on the earth away with it.

Now observe that every human heart has to deal with "the world" as thus conceived. Prone enough as each man is to turn away from God, there is this evil world to help him. The course of this world makes a beaten track for men to walk in; the voice of it calls them; the current

of it sweeps them away. Sometimes it beckons with brilliant prospects; oftener it lures us, bit by bit, with just that vanity which the heart can toy with then. So it whirls men down the stream of its ceaseless movement, until one is ready to say, What can a man do, but go with the world? It presses in on every man, always, *now*, alike in the most trifling vain thought, in the most terrible dark temptation. Another influence, thank God, is also working, another voice calls and claims us; but let us not mistake the reality and the force of the influence proceeding from "all that is in the world."

Now the spring and principle of this vast system—that which in all cases imparts to it its distinctive character, making it to be what it is—is *LUST*. Therefore it is here said "the world . . . and the lust of it." And in the previous verse "all that is in the world" is distinguished into these three heads, "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The word lust is often used to express the grosser kinds of uncontrolled passion or desire, such as are reckoned disreputable and offensive by men in general, owned to be so even by those who indulge them. But the passage last quoted clearly shows that we are not so to limit it here.

The nature of lust properly speaking is inclination either striving against God, or exercising itself without God. In the infinite variety of inclinations and desires that may so break loose, many, perhaps most, are in themselves lawful,—good parts of the constitution of man as he was meant to be. But when they divorce themselves from law and right, when they shake off the control which gives order and beauty to the moral world, when they part from God, then they take the nature of lust. A parent's love for a child is one of the most beautiful and beneficent of impulses; but when it becomes wilful, idolatrous, self-pleasing, then it takes this evil character. The man who just follows his inclinations and makes it his business in life to please himself, apart from the love and the service of God, is a man of lust. He is so whatever line he takes, and whether the impulses he gratifies are more violent or more moderate.

This, then, is the forming principle of the world. Inclination breaking loose from God and from law, or broken loose from these, is lust. It is as the object of lust that any of the good creatures of God come to form part of the "world," in the darker sense in which it occupies us just now. It is as one that lusteth, that any man

"loves the world" and becomes part of the world. Look abroad on the infinite variety of things and persons which, in one way or another, in themselves or in their use, are separated from God, and you call it, in its multiplicity, the world. Look for that which gives it unity and binds it all in one, and you find it to be lust. This, then, is what the Apostle speaks of first—"the world and the lust thereof."

2. We turn to the other course, or character, set before us in the text—"he that doeth the will of God."

In order to form a general notion of this kind of life, little explanation is needed; or, if any darkness overhangs the point, explanation can do little to take it away. This man must be one who heartily owns the authority of the Holy One, and who makes His will the supreme rule; which, therefore, he fulfils. This account of it may be further supplemented. There are two kinds of obedience: two ways of having regard to the will of another. Either it may be mere submission, as to an authority which must not be questioned; or it may include a perception and admiration, at least in general, of the moral excellence of the authority we bow to, obedience being animated by consent and love. This last must surely be

supposed here—love and trust upholding the obedience and securing it.

So much may be said, supposing we take the "doing of the will of God" in the barest notion of what the Scripture must mean by it. But that is not enough for our purpose. This business, of the doing of God's will, is perplexed for us by the sinfulness of our state. To perform, in a manner, certain articles of duty is still possible; to keep harmony with the breadth and depth of God's will is another matter. So the question arises, How can this be my case that I shall be in any honest sense a doer of God's will? How shall this come about and be made good in the life of a sinful man?

In answering this, it is vain to begin anywhere but with Him who came into the world of transgressors, being Himself altogether according to the will of God. He came, full of pity and love for us, that He might be "for men"; but He came also with unshaken regard for His Father as supreme, with boundless reverence and love for His Father's will. He came, most inwardly persuaded, most steadfastly assured, that His Father's will always, in all circumstances, was right and good, was to be accepted and obeyed. He came, therefore, as the enemy of all evil, yet He took

the burden of our sins; and under that burden He did the will of God: did it so as to cast endless disgrace upon transgression even while He made atonement for it. "His meat and drink" it was "to do his Father's will." "I do always the things that please him." As the doer of the Father's will, when we were yet without strength, He died for the ungodly.

Each of us that would be indeed a doer of God's will has to make his beginning here, and he has to hold by it ever after. "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." This is the doorway of reconciliation by which we enter again into real inward friendship with the will of God, and find access to the strength which can enable us to do it. In receiving and accepting the Lord Jesus, the doer of the Father's will, we, the transgressors, find ourselves on the new way and become followers of the Lord.

For in so believing we are forgiven and accepted. But then, also, in so believing and in welcoming forgiveness by Christ, we awake to the worth and the obligation of the will of God, and to the hatefulness and misery of transgression. Christ coming into our life, in forgiveness and repentance, proves able to bring us into real agreement with God; and He proves able to make this

new mind on our part not merely a theoretical recognition, but a practical power in the life, a working element in the character. In Christ we have life, for in Him we find God.

Certainly this principle of life, supposing it to be present, has its difficulties. A man must go forward; he must live his life; he must live it in this earth, dealing with the objects and interests which we know so well. Those very things which, taking relation to lust, build up the great system of the evil world, must still be the material of our Christian lives. And they have to be dealt with heartily and vigorously. Business, recreations, arts, sciences, friendships, public services, philanthropies and so forth, have to be taken in hand by each man according to his calling; only, if possible, under the dominion of the new principle. For in all these a man may be loyal to God; and in all of them he may find his own best discipline, learning lessons, gaining experience, bringing forth fruit. That is his duty; and, if he is really learning the mind of Christ, that becomes his aim. True, this carries with it an experience of temptation. Selfwill and idolatry of the creature take occasion to strive for mastery. But "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." He

who has learned to trust in Christ, has become an apprentice in the school in which the will of God is learned and is practised. And we may be real apprentices, we may be honest workmen, even if we come far short of the perfect standard. This is the aim, the prayer, the hope of the sincere Christian, to be through Christ a doer of the Father's will. This therefore also becomes his history. He learns to use the world as not abusing it: to rule it for God, rather than to be ruled by it. The world is for him no longer his portion, his inheritance; it is his appointed place of sojourning and scene of discipline—with a Father's provision for him as he passes through it.

These three things, the believing recognition of Christ, the learning of Christ's mind, the following of Christ, must be thought upon, if we would know what it means for a sinful man to become a doer of God's will. Even when this has come to pass, the doing of God's will is embarrassed for us by temptation without and weakness within. But we find great resources to sustain us; for the Spirit of Christ opens and applies to His children an inexhaustible treasure of divine help and comfort.

So far we have contemplated the two characters,

the two principles of living here set before us. Now, secondly, as to the results.

1. Let us go back to the first of these two ways, and see what will come of it—what will come of it *at best.* Let us, as it were, say no ill of it, beyond what the very nature of the case makes palpable. What does it end in? Why, the world and the lust of it pass away.

This may seem so obvious as to be a truism. So it is. And yet it is needful to be pressed upon our minds. It is a vain thing to suppose that a creature of God shall succeed in finding welfare apart from Him and without Him; and so God has been pleased to stamp vanity, very conspicuously, on this mortal life and on all that belongs to it. The most artful worldly wisdom that can employ itself on the business finds this to be so. There is so much vanity and precariousness, such disappointment and dissatisfaction about it, that moralists have descanted on it for ages, and the topic is now worn out. This appears, is made to appear plainly enough, during the period of our possession of earthly things; but it appears yet more conclusively in the end. For, first, the whole passes away for each man at death; and then for the whole world of men, the system at last shall pass away for ever. The

system of this world shall be broken up; the whole influences and impulses of it swept away; all that makes it possible to carry on a career of this kind shall disappear; the world and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.

The world shall pass away, the world "*and the lust of it*": that is, I apprehend, not only the objects lusted after, but all that now makes it possible to live on the principle of worldly expectancy, looking hopefully for the satisfaction of desire from worldly sources. I suppose the greater part of worldly happiness arises not so much from the feeling that we have attained our object, so far, as from an expectation that there is more to follow: "To-morrow shall be as this day and much more abundant." Well, that shall pass. The disposition in general may remain, but there is no more possibility of this exercise of it. What made this kind of life possible has passed away.

Suppose the case of one who has adhered to the world and the lust of it; and what comes of it all at last? Here is a man who set before him certain objects of pursuit—they came before him, and attracted him and led him on. He set his heart on them and kept them in view: his plans were laid, his means selected and set on work, his

whole soul formed and fitted itself to a certain course of things, the "course of this world." Suppose, if you like, that some of his objects were attained, that of course would not imply that pursuit for him was over; the worldly man must press forward and seek more of the same, or more of what is like it. That is the instinct of the world. Well, thus it has been; and now—every thread is broken, every purpose frustrated, every line of worldly progress stopped. All is over and gone.

In this world the man was to lay the foundations and make the beginnings of an immortal existence. And he did make his beginning, taking his course about it busily. And all that he began has passed away; all that he set his heart on has passed away; the only world he is fit to go forward in has passed away.

Not to speak of baser impulses,—perhaps a ruling motive with the man was lust of fame. He longed, planned, suffered, toiled, envied, lived for fame. And all breaks off with an abruptness that actually mocks him. This has no significance in the place where he has now arrived. There they look on the world's titles to fame with other eyes.

Or it was wealth; he would be rich; for this

he wrought; over the growth of it he rejoiced. But has that desire any meaning when the world has passed away?

Or, to name a nobler aim, it was learning, on which laborious days and sleepless nights were spent. What comes of it now? Partly it proves untrue, partly useless, wholly superseded.

More generally,—for this underlies all these cases,—and men rarely are actuated by one impulse only—in the sense explained already the life was ruled by lust, which gives being and character to this world. It was of the world and for the world, and the world has passed away.

Can he not now make a fresh beginning, start on a new principle, go more wisely? Alas! if there were no other hindrance, if no principle interposed, if it were otherwise possible, consider the state in which the man himself is. He has made the beginnings of what he is to be. He has formed and fixed his character. He has emerged on the new scene a man of the world and the lust of it. Now, he is in a region where the great principles, the facts and the forces, of the kingdom of God are bearing in upon him: worldliness and lust can gain no footing here. If the world and the lust of it could return, such a man as he could get a footing and begin again; but

mere repugnance and recoil obtain between the world and the lust of it, and all he meets with now. He is here with the accustomed impulses urging him to follow them out, but there is no possibility of doing so any more. All the principles and springs out of which his life on earth was developed are calling for an element, a world, to work forward in; but it has passed away. Here is a man at a dead stand. His world has passed away.

It is sad when men commit follies that ruin their earthly prospects; but it is far sadder to be a fool for Eternity.

2. "But he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

It may seem that this man also is subject to vanity even as others, and so has no tangible advantage; for earthly things are the elements in which and on which earthly life must be expended, even if a man seek to fulfil God's will about them. They are in some sense the material out of which earthly life is built, whatever the principle may be that governs the builder—whether love of them or love of the Father. And even in the case of this man (for it is the experience of all men) a certain vanity attaches to earthly things and occupations, and all of us must feel it. *As* earthly pursuits

these activities shall pass away; and before they do so, the imperfection and disappointment that cleave to things earthly will be felt attaching to them. That will be felt not merely in so far as the worldly spirit infects and mars the life, but in men's best and brightest works—such as are done for Christ's glory and the good of men. Being done on earth with earthly means, something perishable cleaves to them. And as at last the body dies, so also must all earthly works and purposes break off with a world that passes away. But as the body shall be raised, a spiritual and glorious body—so shall the substance of works that are wrought in God survive and abide.

The man shall abide. Now that the world and the lust of it pass, he shall stand forth a man meet for the region in which he is to be. His character needs no revolution in order to adapt him to his new conditions, it needs only expansion and progress. He has firm foothold in the spiritual world: it is the very world for him. On earth he made choice of the will of God in Christ: he ventured on that as his career, and on Christ as the redeemer and life-giver; he gave himself up to be formed to it through years of life. And now, instead of finding his career stopped, inter-

rupted, broken off, it only opens up for him wonderfully when the world and the lust of it has passed away. The course which he followed imperfectly but really when he was dealing with the mouldering things of earth, the things that pass away, he has no need to alter now. He has only to go forward. The *things amid* which his trial and discipline went on have vanished; but the *man*, the man that emerges at last, he abides for ever. He is the man for whom eternity shall reveal an untroubled future of blessedness in the doing of the will of God.

And his work abides. We have acknowledged that the earthly material in which his work was wrought passes away. But in their effect, in their spiritual significance, those works of his in which God's will was done on the earth, abide.

"What," it may be said, "shall years perhaps of the shop, the counting-house, of the commonest avocations,—shall these and the works of them prove durable in any conceivable sense?"

Yes, if in these was fulfilled a history of serving God; if, in love to Christ, the heart was set on doing God's will, they shall abide. The things, the common mouldering things, that pass and disappear shall prove to have been the very fittest

elements in which to train the man as a child of God. In the kinds of duty they imposed, in the temptations and trials arising from them, often in their intrinsic commonness and insignificance, they prove to be the fittest which the universe could supply to carry on the momentous education, from the beginning of it, when the man first believed, to its issues in the immortality of heaven. The eternal future of the man springs out of these; and his works in them shall be traced in their effect through all his progress. They shall be very memorable, and they shall be thankfully recalled in far ages. "Their works do follow them." "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

My brethren, one or other of these two histories shall be ours. Very easily, very quietly, we may let ourselves drift on with the world and the lust of it, and so cast away the outset of an immortal life. Also we may, not so easily and passively, yet we may by the grace of God, answering to the call of Christ and proving His grace—we may be doers of the will of God, fighting the good fight of faith, and so abiding for ever.

I know it is not easy for some of you, for some of the younger of you especially, to allow full play in your minds to the admonition "Love not the

world." The world—we cannot judge it so hardly; the world—why, keep from its grosser evils, and it offers a thousand fields of honourable effort, a thousand hopeful arenas, a thousand golden prizes. The world seems to claim, to demand it of us, that we should throw our hearts into it and press on. Who has not felt this? But, my brethren, no man seeks to withhold you from life, or from reckoning with the manifold world. Only, be assured that to be ranked among the doers of the will of God, is the only way to get the true good of this world as well as of that which is to come.

THE END

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